



**NATIONAL STATEMENT**

**of the**  
**Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka**

**by**  
**Hon. Dr. Jagath Balasuriya, M. P.**  
**Minister of National Heritage**

**at**  
**The General Policy Debate**

**of the**  
**36<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference**

**of the**  
**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural**  
**Organisation (UNESCO)**

**on**  
**Saturday, 29<sup>th</sup> October 2011**

Mme President of the General Conference,

Mme Chairperson of the Executive Board

Mme Director General

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I wish to extend my country's warm felicitations to Her Excellency, Katalin Bogyay, the newly elected President of the General Conference. Sri Lanka wishes you every success and assures you of our fullest cooperation.

It is also my bounden duty to place on record our appreciation to the outgoing President His Excellency Dr. Davidson Hepburn for his exemplary leadership.

The Executive Board has taken concrete steps for the betterment of the work of this organization. Thank you, to Her Excellency Eleonora Valentinovna Mitrofanova, the Chairperson of Executive Board for her strong leadership.

With the efficient stewardship of Madame Irina Bokova, UNESCO has progressed visibly in the last two years; our appreciation to Madam Director General.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO's noble mandate to build peace in the minds is universally accepted and we greatly appreciate the many efforts being made by the organization to forge international intellectual moral solidarity through its various programmes in Education, Sciences, Culture and Communication, as enshrined in its constitution. UNESCO must feel 65 years young, if it is to have the energy and dynamism to face the huge and complex challenges that beset the modern day world.

Today, the challenges that face us are many. Poverty, terrorism, issues relating to Climate Change and associated natural hazards and food security, figure prominently in the global agenda.

Sri Lanka cannot remain immune to any of these global problems. Having suffered a massive natural disaster in the form of the 2004 tsunami, while trying to achieve the MDGs within the stipulated time frame, Sri Lanka is a country that has managed to achieve middle income status despite all this, showing the country's immense perseverance.

After elimination of three decades of ruthless terrorism, Sri Lanka stands as the only country in the world to have successfully defeated terrorism in recent years.

Today, Sri Lankans of all ethnicities, living in every part of Sri Lanka are free from fear. Sri Lanka has stepped into a new era as a confident nation with a robust economy. I am proud to state that the GDP growth of the country has been consistent at 8% and the country has been upgraded to the 52<sup>nd</sup> place by the World Economic Forum in its Global Competitiveness Report for 2011 to 2012.

Sri Lanka is now well on its way to forge national unity, having resettled a vast majority of Internally Displaced Persons and rehabilitated all of former LTTE combatants, the greater part of who have been reintegrated into society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In keeping with the national importance Sri Lanka places on educating all its children, the integral part of the rehabilitation programmes was ensuring that rapid educational progress was made by the former child combatants, who for so many years were deprived of this basic human right.

Vocational training provided to the ex-combatants covered many areas, enabling them to settle in their own hometowns, opening up employment opportunities to lead a normal life.

The aim of His Excellency the President of Sri Lanka, is to strive for future generations that are trilingual, so as to ensure better understanding among all its countrymen. To this end, the Government of Sri Lanka will be launching its tri-lingual policy in November of 2011. Enhanced efforts are being made to identify, protect and promote the cultural heritage of the minority communities.

Consistent with our policy of quality education for all, Sri Lanka is initiating programmes to enhance the national free education system, in order to mould a generation which will make Sri Lanka a knowledge hub in Asia. To this end, we have integrated ICT education into the school curricula.

The launch of the National Action Plans on Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, which is also a global flagship programme of UNESCO, is in keeping with the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Many are the excellent programmes of UNESCO, as also, that of the other sister UN agencies. Yet, all these efforts will be in vain, unless we solve disparities that beset the international community, such as exclusion, inequality and injustices. The nature of fora such as the General Conference presents us with the opportunity to reflect on the values and ideals, which are the very essence of the UN system.

The UNESCO Executive Board has taken the bold step to propose to the General Conference, to admit Palestine to the fold of UNESCO, to enable its long suffering population who are presently in a stateless situation, to gain benefit for their basic needs of education, scientific advancement, cultural preservation and to be able to better communicate with the rest of the world. Sri Lanka believes that the people of Palestine should be given a just and durable solution to their longstanding demand, which in turn, could influence the rest of the world. As such, it is the whole world that will stand to benefit. We strongly support the membership of Palestine in UNESCO. Are we therefore, going to stand in their way and also in the way of fostering global peace by saying no to such an initiative?

This is the question we all have to answer today. Let us be true to ourselves and to the society to whom we owe a great deal to, so that our children and our future generations will have a better world to live in.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, Sri Lanka believes that in a globalized world, the international community has to play an important role, to rid the world from the global challenges. The programmes must be revitalized befitting today's realities. The strategic direction of this organization therefore should lead the way to lessen the gap between the developed and the developing world.

At the core of UNESCO and its programmes, lies the seed that cultivates a full human being. Hence, this august assembly should make a conscience decision to take the road not taken before.

I wish all success to the work of the 36<sup>th</sup> session of the UNESCO General Conference!

May the Triple Gem Bless you all!