Delegation from
Afghanistan

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Position Paper for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

The topics before the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization are: World Heritage Sites: Balancing Tourism and Preservation; Preserving Linguistic Diversity; and Education and Science for Agriculture in Africa. Afghanistan is committed to the continued conservancy of cultural heritage in all forms as well as the forward progression of agricultural ventures, specifically in Africa.

I. World Heritage Sites: Balancing Tourism and Preservation

Afghanistan is continually aimed toward the safeguarding of World Heritage sites and supports ongoing preservation while enabling local economic activity and resultant tourism to thrive. The forfeiture of these sites on an international scale, due both to negligent upkeep or purposeful desecration, marks a loss of history and culture worthy of grief worldwide. UNESCO’s Afghanistan Heritage and Extractive Industries Development Initiative, funded by the World Bank through the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, has worked in conjunction with Afghans in efforts to re-establish the cultural landmark and Islamic sanctuary of the Bamiyan Valley, an area faced with significant degradation and need of preservation due to the ruin of its 6th century Buddha statues by the Taliban in 2001, along with the 12th century historical minaret and archaeological remains of Jam. The programme works closely with both the Afghan Ministry of Mines and Petroleum (MoMP) as well as the Ministry of Information and Culture (MoIC) to empower them with the technical knowledge and assistance to advance their operations with care near over 2,500 registered cultural heritage sites and two World Heritage sites around the country. The programme also aims to equip Afghanistan with skills of heritage management, including but not limited to the employment of MoIC and MoMP in carrying out heritage impact assessments and surveying. The two-year programme, ending in 2016, should allow Afghanistan the continuing ability to enhance and preserve its historical sites and embrace resultant tourism while also bolstering its resultant economic gains from the mining, petroleum, and tourism industries or other aspects of the private sector. Afghanistan believes this model may be replicated. Implementation of similar measures in other states, specifically developing states, would be an effective use of funds and power. Additionally, Afghanistan supports the implementation of close working relationships between member states with a similar aim of universal preservation, specifically geared toward assisting states recovering from disaster or war. An important problem to note, antiquities smuggling, must be combatted by rigorous international antique trade standards so that terror groups or black market sellers cannot profit off of stolen historical artifacts or items from heritage sites. Afghanistan remains in support and cooperation of the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export, and transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property in partnership with continued efforts against such exchanges. The United States and the US National Park Service (NPS) have also proven instrumental in the recovery of and continued preservation efforts toward world heritage in Afghanistan, bolstering support from dedicated internationals to sweep up and refurbish what years of conflict and anti-iconoclastic defacement attempted to destroy. Afghans in return work with the NPS in the American Southwest to learn management strategies at national parks. Such efforts, aimed toward World Heritage sites and greater world heritage overall, cultivate national pride and create various employment opportunities for Afghans. Generous donations from both the Republic of Korea and Italy have too assisted Afghanistan’s efforts to focus beyond mere infrastructure (although very important) to cultural heritage and World Heritage sites by means of preservation. Enhancing member state economies while focusing on both multinational and domestic preservation efforts should be a shared end goal for all member states.

II. Preserving Linguistic Diversity

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has, for centuries, boasted a vast amount of cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity and cherishes this as what makes it dynamic in its role as a geographic intersection between central, south, and southwest Asia. The peoples of Afghanistan are just as diverse, with Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, Turkmen, Aimaq, Baluch, Nuristani, and Kizilbash being the major ethnic groups. Afghanistan enumerates two official languages in Chapter 1, Article 16 of the Constitution of Afghanistan: Pashto and Dari. Nevertheless, Afghanistan’s constitution mandates that wherever a majority speaks a language that is not Pashto or Dari, it is an official language. While this allows for greater governmental and economic participation in areas of the country where
Pashto and Dari are not the spoken language, Afghanistan recognizes that this cannot be replicated internationally. Afghanistan believes that multilingualism and the pathways to oral tradition through indigenous or endangered languages are important, however recognizes that not every language needs to be saved to achieve “linguistic diversity.” Rather, Afghanistan recommends the implementation globally of efforts to record, preserve, and celebrate endangered language, as well as school curricula which include studies on indigenous language and linguistic diversity to preserve the heritage of languages in the Atlas of the World’s Languages in Danger list, even if they fall out of spoken use. Schools and institutions for children in multilingual areas should strive to be accessible to all students and learners; even if only one language is used in a classroom environment, other languages can be taught about and used in signage to recognize the benefits of bilingually speaking both one’s home language and that of their peers. Afghanistan is in full support of UNESCO’s continued literacy efforts both inside its borders and worldwide and supports the implementation of linguistically diverse internet domains and local content in order to expand the scope of multilingualism on the internet. With such a vast and open tool as the Internet, languages can be shared and their speakers can partake in the Internet activity using their own mother tongue devoid of fear of being misunderstood or failing to comprehend such content. This also supports economic growth and globalization while limiting detraction from diversity by opening the Internet to those who only know a mother tongue, as well as multi or bilingual persons, enabling e-commerce and other online activities such as education.

III. Education and Science for Agriculture in Africa

As Africa’s population steadily grows, there is an unprecedented need for aid to its agriculture, which has fallen into crisis as the demand for food rises higher than ever. Afghanistan has faced similar problems in its decades of war, and therefore understands Africa’s dire need, one made especially dire due the estimated increase of the African population from 1.1 to 2 billion by 2050. Although food production per person in Africa has seen an increase since 2008, much more work needs to be done. Afghanistan supports the implementation of science, technology, and innovation (STI) in Africa as a means for such growth, and is in full support of initiatives such as the joint UNESCO and Rubisadt Foundation effort to teach young women self-sufficiency through science-based after school classes in Cameroon. Afghanistan believes that empowering young women is a crucial step in the process of enhancing agriculture and general economic stability, and Afghanistan too is attempting to follow similar efforts to empower girls. Beyond the importance of agriculture due to the high demand for food itself comes the importance of agriculture as a key to poverty reduction in many parts of Africa, and the stemming need for employment ventures as the population booms within the next few decades. Afghanistan thinks it is crucial to expand market ventures as well to further the financial yield from agriculture. Improvement in African states’ infrastructure would result in quicker, safer travels to sell food within the land-locked interior of Africa, and improvements in infrastructure have historically broadened markets. Such improvements in infrastructure would also prove invaluable not only for the transport of food, but to accommodate the greater infrastructural needs in the African continent if the imminent population boom reaches the expected figures. Afghanistan advocates for the donation by member states of technology such as drip-feed systems, micro-sprinklers and fertilizers, which are too expensive for many African farmers to obtain, yet would be an enormous aid to African agriculture. According to SOS Children’s Villages, access to inexpensive fertilizer, Malawi yielded sufficient crops to export food for the first time, opposed to relying on subsistence or purely domestic markets. The implementation of nutrient packed or higher yielding crops will help African states stave off low weight and malnutrition, a problem over a quarter of children under five in sub-Saharan Africa face. These problems impede the development of young bodies and minds that should otherwise be focusing on education to benefit future generations.