



**General Assembly
High-Level Event on Culture and Sustainable Development**

**Draft Remarks
His Excellency Ambassador Munir Akram
President of the Economic and Social Council**

**Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Honorable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my pleasure to join you at the High-Level Event on Culture and Sustainable Development.

Culture's contributions to the Sustainable Development are well recognized.

Today, we gather here with one unified vision: to mainstream culture within our respective policies and activities to achieve a more equitable society.



Culture holds the key to addressing the widening inequities, provides means of subsistence to marginalized populations, and foster social cohesion.

Excellencies,

The responses to the COVID-19 crisis have been varied and uneven.

Countries' level of development had a disproportionate impact on their ability to react to the pandemic and its impacts.

The poorest countries lacked the resources to implement significant stimulus packages to address the economic and social impacts of the crisis and alleviate the suffering of their people.

But I would like to underscore that culture also had an impact.



Cultural dimensions influenced the way countries perceived the pandemic and thus the speed and ambition of the response of governments.

They also impacted on people's responses to public policies, from the acceptance of lockdowns, wearing masks or abiding by social distancing measures – to people's behavior in response to the economic incentives provided through stimulus packages.

This is but one indicator of the deep impact of culture on sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda acknowledged “the natural and cultural diversity of the world and recognize[d] that all cultures and civilizations can contribute to, and are crucial enablers of, sustainable development”.

Culture impacts on the way people define prosperity, well-being and equality, for example the extent to which income dimensions are a dominating criteria.



Culture impacts on our attitude towards work. It will have an important impact on how societies respond to the new dynamics created by the growing importance of new technologies.

Culture also shapes our attitude towards nature and the planet, our consumption and production patterns and thus the impact of humanity on climate change.

It also influences people's attitude towards international cooperation and solidarity in favor of the poorest countries and people.

Excellencies,

Cultural dimensions should thus be taken into account in elaborating and implementing plans and policies for sustainable development.

According to UNESCO, the voluntary national reviews that have been submitted to the United Nations High-Level Political Forum



on sustainable development have shown progress regarding the integration of culture into national policies.

In particular, they reflected an overall trend towards greater linkages with social inclusion and education, as well as new emphasis on indigenous communities, economic development and technology.

I welcome the work of the UN system and UNESCO in particular on integrating culture in sustainable development. Through education, we can evolve towards a world where cultural diversity is preserved, but respects for others and solidarity with the poorest are universally embraced.

Excellencies,

There are hard issues we need to confront heads on.

A key one is the impact of cultural differences on geopolitical relations and aspects such as migration and refugees. Those become all the more vital as COVID-19 has opened the door for



more nationalistic approaches and more constraints on the movement of people. Many misperceptions of State behavior arise from a loss of understanding of other cultures.

In our globalized world, there is increased interaction among all cultures and civilizations. While we discount the theories of a clash of cultures, does create friction between and within States. While we discount the theories of a “clash of cultures”, prejudices do create friction between and within states.

The greatest paradox of today’s world is that while it has brought people closer and created vast networks of connectivity and inter-dependence, it has also spawned divisions and frictions among and within cultures.

The exploitation of COVID-related fears to stoke racism, stigmatization, and violence against States, individuals and groups demonstrate the deep-rooted nature of the challenge ahead of us.



In many places, the virus has aggravated the clash of cultures and religions, inciting new waves of violence. One example is lack of appreciation of the harm caused by insults to religious personalities, holy books; the conflation of religion with terrorism and violent extremism. The social profiling of people and ethnic recalling faced violence and discrimination.

The enormity and complexity of this problem continues to grow, partly by due to the erosion of checks and balances against hate speech, and partly by mainstreaming of hatred, contempt and hostility through unregulated social media platforms driven by cultural prejudices and intolerance.

It is my firm belief that promotion of mutual co-existence requires building bridges, not burning them; respecting each other's norms, mores, ethos, and dogmas, not ridiculing them.

Irrespective of our diversity, it is in our enlightened interest to avoid denigration of cultures, eliminate discrimination, and combat incitement to violence.



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The value of culture is universal and timeless, yet the way we engage with culture continues to evolve.

Let us, together, unlock the potential of culture for recovery from COVID-19 and sustainable development.

I thank you.