REGIONAL MEETING OF AFRICAN NATIONAL COMMISSIONS FOR UNESCO

11th -14th SEPTEMBER, 2022

ACCRA DECLARATION

We, the National Commissions for UNESCO in Africa having gathered in Accra, Ghana, from 11th – 14th September 2022, on the occasion of the Africa regional meeting of National Commissions convened with financial support from the Government of Ghana, UNESCO and National Commission partners from Germany, Canada, France and Azerbaijan ; to strengthen the relevance, effectiveness, and the overall strategic positioning of the Global Priority Africa Programme to address Africa's contemporary challenges; and to this end, we adopt the present Accra Declaration which converges our common strategic priorities and outlines a clear agenda for Africa National Commissions for UNESCO to contribute to implementing Global Priority Africa Programme for the benefit of the Continent.

PREAMBLE:

1. *Recalling* General Conference decisions, 25 C/Resolution 27, 37 C/Resolution 1, 40 C/Resolution 61, 40 C/Resolution 102, 40 C / Resolution 103 and 41 C/ Resolution on Global Priority Africa Programme, and in recent times, the conclusions and recommendation of sub-regional and regional meetings on same,

2. *Recognizing* the unique role and competencies of National Commissions in the overall constitutional architecture of UNESCO and the UN System as a whole, to provide strategic contacts and interfaces in Member States for the purposes of associating governmental and non-governmental bodies with the work of the Organization, in the areas of Education, Natural Sciences, Social and Human Sciences, Culture, Communication and Information,

3. *Considering* the critical role of National Commissions for UNESCO in contributing to the Global Priority Africa Programme including engineering partnerships and funding for the Programme to address the challenges of the Continent, noting, issues relating to progress on SDG4 targets; biodiversity conservation for peace and development; emerging technologies and Artificial Intelligence (AI); heritage management and a pluralistic media for a peaceful Continent,

4. *Noting with concern* the impact of contemporary, international, multidimensional crises linked to climate change, armed conflicts, natural disasters, pandemics (including the COVID 19 and its impact on the UNESCO domains in Africa); uncontrolled urbanization, the digital divide and widening knowledge and skills gaps, unsustainable development patterns, leading to increased poverty, setbacks, and exacerbated inequalities,

5. *Express appreciation* to UNESCO for the continuous prioritization of the needs of Africa, and, for the adoption of a new Operational Strategy for Global Priority Africa Programme, which is rooted in Agenda 2030 and the Africa Union's Vision 2063 for "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena",

6. *Stress* the urgent need for national and international development community, including UNESCO to strengthen collaboration at the national, sub-regional and regional levels to implement Global Priority Africa Programme for an improved understanding of its relevance and potential to address the challenges of Africa,

7. *Express appreciation* to the Government of Ghana, UNESCO, and the community of National Commissions of UNESCO for the initiative to organize this important meeting on Global Priority Africa Programme,

8. *Invite* National Commissions of UNESCO in Africa to reactivate its regular biennial meetings to be hosted voluntarily by Member States in the five electoral regions on a rotational basis,

9. *Further invite* National Commissions for UNESCO in African Member States to strengthen collaboration with Development Partners (DPs), International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), foundations, and similar institutions towards increased partnerships and engagement for Global Priority Africa Programme,

10. *Stress* the need for the Secretariat of UNESCO to recognize National Commissions' statutory role as enshrined in the Constitution of UNESCO, the Architecture of National Commission, and related UNESCO documents, to foster a more effective collaboration between National Commissions and UNESCO Field Offices.

CALL TO ACTION:

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON THE SDG 4 TARGETS

We, the National Commissions for UNESCO in Africa:

1. <u>Acknowledge</u> the abiding relevance of UNESCO's mandate and multilateral actions to promote education and its transformative power to create a global society of opportunities and peace for the peoples of the world,

2. <u>Recognize</u> UNESCO's efforts to promote inclusive and equitable quality education to accelerate progress towards SDG 4 targets in Member States, and the ongoing initiatives to transform education; emphasizing effective education policy planning, implementation, and monitoring to address many of the socio-economic challenges confronting the Continent, and how UNESCO's gains have suffered setbacks due to the COVID 19 pandemic, and therefore:

3. <u>Underscore</u> the urgent need for the International Development Community including the United Nations, non - governmental Organizations, foundations, and similar institutions to prioritize matters of concern to Africa including Global Priority Africa Programme and in particular, the urgent need for young people and adults to be supported to have access to quality and inclusive education, emphasizing peace, gender equality and global citizenship education in the curricula, as outlined in the 2030 targets and through pedagogical approaches that facilitate the acquisition of knowledge and skills, necessary for the 21st Century World of work,

4. <u>Further underscore</u> the need for young people, adults and persons living with disabilities to have the right to education and training, equal access to technical and vocational education and training, as well as access to special education and learning opportunities supported through appropriate digital infrastructure and content to realise the potential of learners with disabilities,

5. <u>Encourage</u> UNESCO and Member States to ensure that education workforce in Africa have the required knowledge, skills, and qualifications to provide Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) as well as Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) education at all levels, including support for the development of national TVET qualification framework in Member States,

6. <u>Call on</u> the national, regional, and international development community to deepen partnership in support for education, including funding, to compliment governments efforts in addressing education related problems in Member States,

7. <u>Further call</u> on UNESCO and the UN System to support African countries, develop the necessary educational digital technologies and learning infrastructure systems for the benefit of both educators and learners stimulating thinking and creativity required for the 21st Century,

8. <u>Urge</u> UNESCO Member States to engineer the needed partnerships with the private sector to build capacity in the design and delivery of digital bite-sized, practical learning materials that appeal to educators and learners, as supplementary tools for engagement to improve learning outcomes,

9. <u>Further encourage</u> African governments to engage the private sector including telecommunication companies to reduce the cost of online engagement as well as provide increased access to electricity including its alternative sources, internet, and smart devices in support of education transformations and digital learning,

10. <u>Commit</u> to complementing the efforts of UNESCO and other partners in this endeavour in our various countries.

BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION:

11. <u>Express concern</u> about the fact that our collective commitment to protect nature over time has not yielded the desired dividend globally and has therefore become more important than ever before,

12. <u>Commend</u> UNESCO for the effort to strengthen the Man and Biosphere Programme which has paved the way through the biosphere reserve concept for the protection of nature and biodiversity globally,

13. <u>Encouraged</u> that UNESCO biosphere reserves are charting a clear pathway towards biodiversity and nature conservation, thanks to Member States who continue to designate biosphere reserves and geoparks to demonstrate their commitments to conservation and sustainable development and therefore:

14. <u>Urge</u> African Member States to strengthen measures that formally recognize the contribution of biosphere reserves in the negotiations of the post-2020 Biodiversity Framework as well as step up efforts to designate more biosphere reserves and geoparks in Africa,

15. <u>Consider it urgent</u> for African countries to take pragmatic measures to popularize MAB and its Programmes at the national, sub-regional and regional levels through Clubs for UNESCO and ASPnet activities, knowing the low level of awareness among the populace of biodiversity losses because of climate change, land, and water degradation,

16. <u>Further urge</u> Africa governments to encourage the greening of our cities, towns, and villages by creating open spaces for gardens with grass lawns, herbs, shrubs and trees; knowing that the creation of city green belts will limit urban sprawls and minimize proliferation of concrete jungles,

17. <u>Call</u> on governments to protect landscapes by giving and establishing special values for wetlands, wilderness areas, and heritage sites with special geomorphological and floristic features as well as seascapes targeting estuarine brackish and salt marshy, lagoon and coastal areas.

THE PEDAGOGICAL USE OF THE GENERAL HISTORY OF AFRICA (GHA):

18. <u>Commend</u> UNESCO and partners for the continuous support to the General History of Africa project since its inception including the ongoing efforts to enrich the project with additional three (3) Volumes as well as the setup of an eleven member Scientific Committee through the Africa Union to assume intellectual and scientific responsibility for the second phase of the project,

19. <u>Remind ourselves</u> of the core objective of the project – *'to help renew history education in the Member States of the African Union, by highlighting the common heritage of the African peoples with a view to promoting mutual understanding, regional integration, peace building and the strengthening of links between Africans and people of African descent', thereby* <u>affirming</u> the importance and relevance of the GHA in the current global context including its relationships with the *'Routes of Enslaved People: Resistance, Liberty, Heritage Project'*, to restore dignity and self-confidence and to build African identity and citizenship that will enable future generations to actively contribute to a common African vision in an increasingly globalized world,

20. <u>Concerned about</u> recent outcomes of the Stock Taking Meeting in May 2021 which indicated that the GHA is neither widely disseminated nor sufficiently used for educational purposes in Member States and therefore:

21. <u>Call on</u> African governments to take steps through their Ministries of Education to implement the project's component on the pedagogical use of the GHA in schools, through the preparation of common pedagogical content for use at all levels of the educational system (outline curricula, textbooks etc.), and commend governments that have already taken steps to do same in their educational systems,

22. <u>Encourage</u> governments to explore creative ways of promoting and disseminating GHA through animation, illustrations, music, drama, E-learning tool, films, documentaries, photography, and storytelling to transform GHA content to reach people of all ages free of stereotypes and biases,

23. <u>Commit ourselves</u> to organizing at least one initiative in our respective countries with the support of the national governments, UNESCO Field Offices on the subject of the GHA during the current biennium.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN AFRICA:

24. <u>Reaffirm</u> our commitment to support UNESCO re-imagine how emerging technologies and, those related to ethical Artificial Intelligence applications could be harnessed to unleash its transformative power for socio-economic progress of the Africa Continent and:

25. <u>Underline</u> the fact that UNESCO Member States must address serious knowledge and capacity gaps in Artificial Intelligence that exist between Africa and the developed world.

26. <u>Urge</u> our respective governments to engage in the development of inclusive, ethical AI technologies that are appropriate for Africa; ensure that local needs are contextualized into AI policy formulations; and develop legal frameworks to facilitate the implementation of UNESCO Recommendations on Ethics of Artificial Intelligence,

27. <u>Further advocate</u> for African governments to draw young minds into the STEM fields and technologies related to Artificial Intelligence targeting not only students at the graduate and postgraduate levels but also children at an early age through games and the learning of concepts and subjects related to AI, without necessarily having a computer,

28. <u>Stress</u> the importance of African universities to increase international collaborations to practicalize AI technologies and promote research and publications amongst academics in the context of north-south, south - south cooperation with a view to foster effective networking and experiential learning in this area,

29. <u>Encourage</u> governments to provide scholarships for STEM students to train in top rated AI-centered universities including internships and opportunities through blended and online courses.

30. <u>Congratulate</u> the Southern African Development Community (SADC) for organizing the regional Forum on AI and encourage the West, Central, East, and North regional blocs to organize similar activities with the support of Morocco (AI Movement and University Polytechnic Mohamed VI)

MEDIA PLURALISM IN AFRICA:

31. <u>Underscore</u> the fact that a pluralistic media landscape allows for divergent political and ideological views which enables the representation of different political, cultural, and social groupings, which to a large extent, afford greater access to variety of information and inclusive content for greater participation and development of the media,

32. <u>Concerned</u> that around the world, and in particular Africa, media pluralism has come under threat in recent years, especially in public and public interest media; that notwithstanding, there are also growing concerns regarding the stifling of pluralism which manifests in increased attack on journalists and other media workers with the objective to suppress divergent views, opinions, and ideas,

33. <u>Regret</u> that although political debate across media platforms in Africa appears more open and dynamic, it is thriving within a complex system of clientelism forged on shifting alliances between politicians and business tycoons. We regret that the media–politics interplay has taken a competitive and antagonistic forms, effectively exacerbating polarized conflicts in most parts of Africa and in that context:

unesco
Ghana
Commission for UNESCO

unesco

African Union

unesco
Canadian Commission

unesco
Commission nationale
française pour l'UNESCO

unesco
German Commission
for UNESCO

unesco
Republic of Azerbaijan
National Commission

- ❖ UNESCO must deepen its work with all stakeholders to rescue media pluralism from its personalized uses and reimagine it more broadly as a normative value that refers to the distribution of communicative power in the public space.

- ❖ Member States must prioritize issues of the media and promote Freedom of Expression, Access to Information, and Safety of Journalists to enable the media to hold duty bearers accountable to citizens.

- ❖ UNESCO must deepen support to governments to develop explicit and multidimensional public policies that preserve quality news and media pluralism as public goods which are indispensable in any democratic society.

- ❖ Member States should ensure equitable allocation of broadcasting licenses between public, community, and commercial broadcasting. Safeguards should be put in place to particularly protect and guarantee the sustainability of community broadcasting.

RETHINKING HERITAGE MANAGEMENT IN AFRICA:

34. Recognize Africa's desire to promote both conservation and the well-being of society as educational outcomes and note the outcome of the 3rd Periodic Reporting on World Heritage Sites in the Africa Region, and the recommendations of the Global Priority Africa Programme,

35. Reaffirm our commitment to National, Regional and UNESCO's normative instruments on heritage, the National Development Plans; the AU Agenda 2063 on a shared strategy for unity, prosperity, well-being, and development of the Continent; the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) and the catalytic role of heritage in the process and therefore:

36. <u>Recognize</u> that heritage in Africa is first a local value before it becomes global, we strongly advocate that National Commissions for UNESCO in Africa facilitate awareness and the inclusion of heritage dimensions at the local levels of implementation, including advocating for an inclusive heritage management framework in their respective nations and involving local communities in the process in Africa,

37. <u>Further recognize</u> the UNESCO Educational kits and their role in improving pedagogical approaches in Africa, and we remain committed to using them on raising awareness on the importance of heritage in its diversity in Africa,

38. <u>Underscore</u> the urgency to re-imagine the value proposition of heritage together with stakeholders and/or local communities to facilitate both the caring of heritage and the well-being of society, while building bridges in and for heritage management in Africa as an educational, conservation, socio-economic and community development outcome,

39. <u>Advocate</u> for innovativeness and creativity in heritage education programmes in Africa, including facilitating curriculum reviews to include heritage dimensions (while considering integrating the diaspora dimensions and indigenous knowledge systems of Africa), and embracing Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and associated tools.

40. We therefore encourage Africa Member States to:

❖ <u>Continue influencing</u> education curriculum reviews and accompanying policy changes to integrate cultural heritage into mainstream educational objectives and outcomes in Africa, including raising educational awareness of the relationship between heritage and sustainable development, as well as heritage and climate change, and emerging new heritage typologies in Africa.

❖ <u>Involve</u> the youth and women in heritage education activities in Africa as a continuous investment in capacity building to address the widening inter-generational and technical skills gap, including facilitating gender equality and job opportunities in Africa.

❖ <u>Facilitate</u> dialogue on heritage issues at the local level as agents of change linking local communities/stakeholders with UNESCO programmes and activities in Africa, including on issues of social justice, human rights-based approaches, national identities, peace and reconciliation, nation building and social cohesion among others.

❖ <u>Improve</u> Institutional capacity and effectiveness of National Commissions for UNESCO in supporting and facilitating cultural heritage programmes and activities at national, regional and international levels, alongside management authorities of heritage places and institutions in Africa by employing bottom-up planning approaches involving stakeholder/local communities in Africa.

❖ <u>Commit</u> to support at least one initiative on Heritage preservation, and further participate in the UNESCO - Accra World Book Capital 2023, which represent a Ghanaian, African, and Global project.

OPERATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

<u>We urgently request</u> the Ghana Commission for UNESCO and the Permanent Delegation of Ghana to UNESCO to share the Accra Declaration with the Africa Group at UNESCO and AU/COREP in Addis Ababa.

We further commit to creating operational platforms for exchanges per sub-region and at the continental level to ensure fast sharing of information on UNESCO activities and in particular the Global Priority Africa Programme.

FUND FOR AFRICAN NATIONAL COMMISSIONS FOR UNESCO:

<u>Further recalling</u> the constitutional role and importance of National Commissions for UNESCO, we call on the Director – General of UNESCO to facilitate the immediate establishment of a central Fund, through voluntary contributions from Member States and partners that can be accessed by National Commissions for UNESCO for the purpose of supporting Global Priority Africa Programme as well as promoting UNESCO in Africa Member States.

CONCLUSION:

We, the National Commissions of UNESCO in African Member States, pledge our commitment and support to this Accra Declaration. We commit to be innovative and creative in the use of our unique competencies, expertise, and networks at the national, sub-regional and regional levels to engineer the necessary partnerships, including funding, to implement the Global Priority Africa Programme on the Continent.

To this end, we pledge to host regular biennial meetings through a voluntary hosting arrangement by Africa Member States, and partners.

We finally call on the Director-General of UNESCO to deepen collaboration with the regional and international development community to implement the Global Priority Africa Programme through innovative approaches involving, notably, the Private Sector in the current Operational Strategy (2022-2029) given its relevance and potential in mitigating the challenges of Africa.

Done in Accra, on the 12th Day of September 2022.