

## **National Statement of the Netherlands at the occasion of the 201th UNESCO Executive Board**

### **Ambassador H.E. Lionel Veer:**

In many ways UNESCO works for a better future. Not with hard power, but soft power, with ideas. Doing this we often talk about young people and how we can help them. Often I thought we should not only talk about them, but talk with them more, listen to them and let them help us.

That is why today I asked the Dutch Youth Representative to UNESCO Mary Kachavos, to take my place and address the Executive Board on behalf of the Netherlands.

Mary, the floor is yours!

### **Dutch Youth Representative Mary Kachavos:**

Mister President, Madame Director General, Your Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to speak before UNESCO's Executive Board as Dutch UN Youth Representative to UNESCO. Most of the Board's decisions have or will have an impact on young people from all around the world. If UNESCO wishes to work towards a better future for all generations, the organization needs to include youth from all over the world as a specific category in UNESCO governance.

A big threat to the future of Dutch youth today is the threat of violent extremism. In the Netherlands, where children are known to be among the happiest in the world, there is increasing fear of the future. We grew up without war but today, 39% of young people in my country are afraid that they will see war in their lifetime, and 25% of Dutch students in vocational education still feel unsafe at school.

Fortunately, most young people in the Netherlands still share UNESCO's values. Our team of Dutch UN Youth Representatives facilitates discussions among young people on UNESCO topics, like tolerance and interfaith dialogue, and shares the results with policymakers. Every single time, I see that UNESCO's mission 'to construct the defenses for peace in the minds of women and men' is more relevant than ever.

Our generation grew up in Europe with open borders, and the majority still believes that people with different religious and cultural backgrounds can live together in harmony. The presence of safe spaces in schools and homes to confront and respectfully debate these differences is crucial for maintaining and creating peaceful societies.

However, the addressing of root causes of violence can only be done when everyone has a voice, and for these endeavors to be successful, structural youth participation in all levels of government is needed. As emphasized in UN Security Council Resolution 2250, active inclusion of youth in peacebuilding and preventing violent extremism means active and equal inclusion in governance.

Dear members of the Board. What is necessary at the national level, is also necessary at the international level. Young people are capable of organizing ourselves, and will gladly do so to work on making UNESCO values reality. Please make use of that – or we risk that the goodwill of young people around the world will be turned to cynicism and our energies channeled towards forms of identity and activism which may be less aligned with UNESCO's mandate!

To end: I call on you to prepare the Youth Forum for the upcoming General Conference with youth from all around the world as equal partners, as a way of guaranteeing that we can influence the important decisions UNESCO makes about our future.

Thank you for your attention.

Paris, 24 April 2017