

UNESCO as an international organization with its 193 Member States, among which all of the CAREC member countries, aims at building peace in the minds of men and women. In particular UNESCO fosters education as a mean to transform lives, empowers culture as a driver of economy, promotes sciences to create and disseminate knowledge and understanding, and strives foster freedom of expression, media development and access to information and knowledge.

UNESCO considers CAREC as one of the most important cooperation platforms to establish dialogue with development partners to achieve common goals in the region. As today we are discussing the Digital strategy we wish to bring to your attention two items. The first one is that of Open Science. We would urge you to democratize the digitization of the region and ensure access to common goods produced globally, regionally and nationally. Open science fosters openness, transparency and inclusiveness and can help create a collaborative environment that will give birth to solutions to complex and interconnected environmental, social and economic challenges for the people and the planet.

In the meantime, new technologies and Artificial intelligence (AI) in particular, have become an important digital instrument affecting billions of people's lives. AI can be useful to increase literacy level globally, create job opportunities for millions, tackle the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, but along with multiple advantages, if not regulated, it could generate downside risks and challenges.

UNESCO calls on Member States who participate in today's meeting to put in place national policies and regulatory frameworks to ensure that these emerging technologies benefit humanity as a whole. Science has to be accessible to all and Artificial Intelligence has to be human-centred and serve for the greater interest of the people, not the other way around.

I would like to inform the meeting of UNESCO's support to the CAREC Member States in battling Climate Change and managing their water resources, with a focus on transboundary cases. Some of the countries present today have been experiencing the adverse effects of this change, such as extended droughts, flooding, and the melting of glaciers. Looking into the future, we have to prepare ourselves on how to manage this excess water sustainably and preventing potential disasters from natural hazards such as Glacial Lake Outbursts.

Last but not least, we should not forget the human capital. Access to education in a region with the youngest population is a must. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the digital divide between developed and developing countries. But this education should be of quality and relevant, responding to market needs. UNESCO is helping modernize the TVET sector to reflect the current needs of the agricultural and water sectors and to prepare National Quality Framework to ensure quality education in the region.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to intervene.