

The Tunisian Republic

Positions for the United Nations Educational, Social and Cultural Organization

I. Navigating Iconoclasm Throughout Phases of Conflict in Modern Societies

The Tunisian Republic holds a strong commitment to terminating iconoclasm in modern societies, as the lack of fundamental respect for others' social, political, and religious views is utterly unacceptable in today's world. We strongly believe that the arts are only one of many methods of the expression of belief, and Tunisia has proven itself to be a center for artistic development and expression throughout our history. The 2015 attack on the Bardo National Museum in our capital city, exhibited the blatant disregard for expression of belief. The Tunisian Republic has not only been a beacon of hope for peace in nations where the Islamic faith is given a negative reputation by those who misinterpret the Quran, but also a beacon for change. This is why we take attacks on our expression like the aforementioned aggression demonstrated on March 18, 2015 not only as a direct attack on our own liberties, but as an attack on the liberties of other Member States. Destruction or defacement of the arts not only harms the producer of the arts, but the consumers as well, which is why Tunisia stands in such firm opposition to such heinous acts. After the 2015 violation of our cultural and legal sovereignty at the hands of ISIS, Tunisia has come to realize that combatting iconoclasm at the core is crucial to the expansion of artistic and cultural development not only in Tunisia, but among every other Member State within the United Nations.

We stand firmly with the actions taken by UNESCO in 1972 to prevent and conceivably eradicate iconoclasm in the sense that it topples both hope for a bright and peaceful future, as well as for those wishing to safely express their own personal beliefs. Tunisian development is centered around expansion politically, economically, and artistically. Tunisia has given a safe space to artists in order to expand our democratic, free state, as well as to expand the mind of those interested in the arts. In doing so, we have kept art museums open despite past attacks. Additionally, the Republic of Tunisia took the initiative to update its Constitution in 2014 in response to the Jasmine Revolution. Title I, Article 6, prohibits religious-based violence across the State, which pertains to both the taking of human life and other violent practices like iconoclasm.

Tunisia sees Iconoclasm as not only a hateful and intolerable act, but as something that all Member States must come together to eradicate. The Republic of Tunisia greatly recommends that UNESCO outlines stronger definitions of iconoclasm, enforces stronger reactions to acts of iconoclasm, such as halting a State that does not comply through the use of sanctions, and creating stricter protocols for punishment or sanctions pertaining to non-state groups who partake in such heinous acts. Additionally, the Tunisian government strongly beseeches any and all Member States to follow in editing their regulations for iconoclastic behaviors, as seen in our 2014 rendition of the Tunisian Constitution. To conclude, we look forward to having a detailed and effective discussion concerning iconoclasm during this session of UNESCO, and hope to find a peaceful resolution to combat and exterminate iconoclasm at its core.

II. Improving Access to Quality Education for Vulnerable and At-Risk Populations

Access to education has been a global issue since the inception of the United Nations (UN) and UNESCO, since UNESCO has achieved 43 milestones relative to the betterment of global education. The Tunisian Republic is devoted to improving and expanding access to quality education for at-risk and vulnerable citizens both domestically and internationally. Tunisia believes in values stated in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights calling attention to the importance of education, and grants the right to quality education for all. This is inclusive of vulnerable and at-risk populations. At-risk populations include people that face social and health concerns, and vulnerable populations (VPs), according to the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) include immigrants, refugees, and residents in areas of natural disasters. There are a wide array of peoples included in this population that face the lack of resources, improper infrastructure and discrimination, drawing grave attention for the need to improve the access of quality education.

After gaining independence from France in 1956, Tunisia began taking leaps towards improving our education system for all citizens. Post-independence reforms in education concentrated on producing a labor force for the new Tunisian administration, one that would build a modern economy. In 1991, the Tunisian government passed the New Education Act which lengthened the duration of the basic and secondary levels to 13 years. This resulted in making Tunisia one of the biggest spenders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Tunisia has worked with the World Bank to support our government's efforts to improve the quality of primary education and expand access to preschool in vulnerable and at risk populations. We received a \$100 million dollar loan for The Strengthening Foundations for Learning Project. In addition to expanding education, we worked to empower teachers and school staff to work collaboratively to heighten student achievement, that has assessed the learning in pre-schools to identify and help provide solutions for students of immigrant and refugee families, as well as those stricken by natural disasters and those who face social and health concerns. The Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MESRS) launched the National Dialogue on Education Reform, an initiative that is bringing together the concerned ministries, universities, teachers' unions and students to address four key issues: governance, university life, curriculum development, and scientific research. The national dialogue followed the announcement of a 10-year tertiary educational development plan, known as the Strategic Plan for the Reform of Higher Education and Scientific Research 2015-25.

Tunisia believes that a person becomes disabled when they are excluded and unable to access quality education. In order to achieve SDG 4, promoting and pledging to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, the international community must ensure that at-risk populations and VPs are not excluded from the access of quality education. Tunisia proposes a list of Best Practices that Member States would use when creating a legislature on at-risk populations and VPs, which would include improved infrastructure for education centers, crisis readiness for the vulnerable, and equal quality resources for all. When all at-risk and vulnerable populations are granted access to quality education, everyone will prosper.