

MEDIA STATEMENT

DATE: 13 November 2023

TO: All Media

ATTENTION: News Editors/ Reporters

For Immediate use:

THE MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE 42nd SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION (UNESCO) GENERAL CONFERENCE TAKING PLACE FROM 7-22 NOVEMBER 2023 IN PARIS, FRANCE

The Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, Dr Blade Nzimande will participate in the 42nd Session of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) General Conference taking place from 7-22 November 2023.

The Minister will participate in sessions relating to higher education, science and innovation which commences today, the 13th November 2023.

UNESCO General Conference takes place biennially to determine the organisation's budget and the direction of its programmes and activities. It is attended by member states and associate members, together with observers for non-member states, intergovernmental organisations and non-governmental organisations.

Its proceedings are divided into Commissions specific to the UNESCO major programmes i.e. Education Commission; Science Commission; Culture Commission; Social and Human Sciences Commission; and Communications and Information Commission.

Science Commission (13-14 November 2023)

The Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) will participate in the Science Commission (SC) during the UNESCO General Conference, together with the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE).

The SC is a global platform for discussing ways in which UNESCO can support member states to strengthen science, technology and innovation policies, governance and the science-policy-society interface; build institutional capacity in science and engineering; develop capacity for protecting and sustainably managing the ocean and coasts; foster international science collaboration for earth systems, biodiversity, and disaster risk reduction; and strengthen freshwater security.

The two (2) day agenda for this year's SC includes items aligned to the priority areas of the DSI, i.e. the establishment of Category II Institutes and Centres under the auspices of UNESCO; World Metrology Day; and a proposal for the proclamation by the United Nations of 2025 as an international year of Quantum Science and Technology.

The SC will also receive the 2022-2023 reports from Steering Committees and Councils responsible for implementing the Man and Biosphere Programme, International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme, and Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme.

Other reports set to be tabled during SC would be on the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development (2021-2030) and the activities of the International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) for the period 2022-2023.

With regard to the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development, South Africa together with Egypt have served in the Executive Planning Group (EPG) made of global experts composed of 20 members that served as an advisory body to the IOC governing bodies to support the development of the Implementation Plan as well as the preparatory activities of the Decade.

There is also the IOC Sub-commission for Africa and the Small Islands States (IOCAFRICA) that has produced an Africa-specific implementation plan called the Ocean Decade Africa Roadmap equipped with nine (9) Priority Actions, where collective and collaborative efforts amongst African Member States will be combined to achieve the desired outcomes for the benefit of the African continent and its people. Through these partnerships, South Africa has continued to identify and mobilise resources that can support the Ocean Decade Africa Roadmap activities.

Social and Human Sciences Commission (15-16 November 2023)

Minister Nzimande will also participate in the Human and Social Sciences (SHS) Commission on 15th to 16th November 2023.

The agenda for SHS Commission include items such as the establishment of Category II Institutes and Centres under the auspices of UNESCO; strengthening the implementation of the Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researches; and a preliminary study on the technical and legal aspects relating to the desirability of a standard-setting instrument on the ethics of neurotechnology

Part of initiatives to be discussed includes the Transforming MENTalities Programme, a UNESCO programme which Minister Nzimande launched in August 2023, through HIGHER HEALTH in partnership with Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC).

The programme is aimed at addressing gender biases, stereotypes, violence and discrimination by changing culture and societal norms through policies, advocacy and capacity-building initiatives especially at Institutions of Higher Education. It is one of the flagship programmes initiated by UNESCO under Social and Human Sciences.

There are UNESCO General Conference side events taking place on the week of 13-17 November 2023. Three (3) of them are included in the Minister's day-to-day programme for considering attending them.

UNESCO will be having a side event in the afternoon of November 13 to celebrate the World Science Day for Peace and Development, themed "building trust in science at the nexus of science, policy and society".

Minister Nzimande will be participating in this event as it will feature a high-level roundtable discussion on the importance of freedom of safety of scientists as a key ingredient for science ecosystems driven by universal values and the vital role of science popularisation in enhancing scientific literacy, public awareness and trust in science. The event will be followed by the ceremony of the UNESCO Kalinga Prize for the Popularisation of Science.

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