

**Remarques liminaires bilingues de Sébastien Goupil, secrétaire général,  
Bilingual Opening Remarks by Sébastien Goupil, Secretary-General**

*Check Against delivery / L'allocution définitive fait foi*

Merci Tasha. Distingués collègues. Cher Jack. Chers participants.

La Commission canadienne pour l'UNESCO est très heureuse de s'associer à Metropolis Canada, à l'Association des études canadiennes et à l'Institut Vanier pour cette conférence virtuelle. Je vous remercie de me donner l'occasion de dire quelques mots d'ouverture.

Nous vivons une crise historique sans précédent, qui entraîne depuis plusieurs semaines son lot de défis pour les individus, les familles, les villes, les pays et aussi pour les organisations internationales comme l'UNESCO, l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour l'éducation, la science et la culture. L'UNESCO s'active présentement sur plusieurs fronts, notamment dans les domaines de l'éducation et de la science.

Comme on le sait, il ne s'agit pas seulement d'une crise sanitaire, mais aussi d'une profonde crise socio-économique.

On parle d'un recul de 10 ans dans les efforts de lutte contre la pauvreté dans plusieurs parties du monde. Plusieurs sont convaincus qu'il sera extrêmement difficile d'atteindre les objectifs de développement durable des Nations Unies à l'horizon 2030.

Nous avons une pensée toute spéciale à la Commission pour les nouveaux arrivants, les personnes racisées et d'ascendance africaine ainsi que pour les personnes marginalisées comme les sans-abris qui sont souvent les victimes oubliées de ces grandes crises.

Il y a toutes sortes de questions importantes liées à la mission de l'UNESCO et de notre Commission qui nous préoccupent actuellement. Je pense par exemple aux violences envers les femmes et les filles et aux défis posés par la désinformation ou le manque d'accès à de l'information juste et de qualité. Je pense aussi aux nouvelles formes de racisme subies notamment par les personnes d'ascendance asiatique. La discrimination et le profilage social et racial semblent aussi connaître une nouvelle recrudescence; tous des



enjeux auxquels on essaie de s'attaquer avec les membres de nos réseaux, dont les 80 villes membres de notre Coalition des municipalités inclusives.

We are also increasingly conscious of the role that environmental racism is playing in the pandemic – especially how certain communities have been especially exposed to air pollution or remain concentrated in crowded and deprived neighborhoods with limited access to basic services and even nature.

This is why our Commission did not hesitate to partner for the creation of the COVID-19 Social Impacts Network.

Many of us are currently wondering how the pandemic may or will change our approach to immigration. Not long ago, closing our borders would have been unthinkable. How will this step impact Canada's approach to immigration and welcoming refugees in the future? ACS-Metropolis and Leger Marketing have already shed some light on the impact of the pandemic on newcomers.

One thing is crystal clear: every day, COVID-19 brings questions of privilege into high relief. I would guess that many of us participating in this virtual conference have secure jobs, good internet connections, backyards, and full cupboards. We know, however, that others in our society are obliged to work in risky situations, live in cramped conditions, make difficult choices around child and family care, and rely on food banks to sustain their basic needs.

Factors such as race, age, gender, economic status, being a refugee or a newcomer, or housing situation, are playing a huge role not just in the health of Canadians, but also in their diverse experiences of the pandemic.

We very much need to improve our understanding of these issues to craft the appropriate policy and programming responses.

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I will close by saying that we know that today's gathering is about the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 on newcomers. But I would like to stress that we also need to better understand how the pandemic is affecting Indigenous peoples, who are still fighting the impact of colonialism and the effects of displacement.

Moreover, since seniors are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19, there is a huge risk to cultural survival – elders often remaining keepers of languages, stories, and cultures that we can all learn from, including to build more sustainable and resilient futures.

We also need to learn more about how youth and students from different backgrounds react and cope. As research released last week by StatsCan shows, youth are very concerned about the social and mental health impacts of the pandemic. They also feel that their present and future hang in the balance.

This is a profound teaching moment for our society, where we see the exacerbation and impacts of economic exclusion, discrimination, inequalities and inequities.

And I believe – or at least I profoundly hope – that we are willing to learn from our mistakes and change. I also strongly believe that we collectively have an opportunity to reinvent the way we address those challenges by stepping up and working together.

Thank you. Merci

