

**38th Session of the UNESCO General Conference Policy
Debate**

**Statement by Her Excellency
Ambassador Vilma McNish,
Permanent Delegate of Jamaica
Paris, Wednesday, 4th November, 2015**

Mr. President, I offer sincere congratulations on your election as President of the 38th session of the General Conference of UNESCO. You are assured of Jamaica's full support and cooperation during your tenure.

Your Excellency, President of the Executive Board, we are deeply grateful for your diligent stewardship over the last biennium.

To you Madame Director General, I extend the Government of Jamaica's commendation on your astute leadership of UNESCO amidst the unprecedented challenges facing the Organisation. You have been steadfast and resolute in your efforts to steer the Organisation despite the financial difficulties.

We applaud your tenacity and resolve on behalf of UNESCO to respond to the complex humanitarian crises and cultural tragedies that have resulted from violent extremism and religious intolerance manifested so acutely in the wanton destruction of world heritage sites and the looting and illicit traffic of cultural artefacts and antiquities, particularly in the Middle East.

I take this opportunity to welcome our sister island Monserrat as an Associate Member of UNESCO. You can count on Jamaica's support and collaboration.

Mr. President, seventy years ago at the founding of UNESCO, there was a shared and fervent vision of a multilateral institution that would harness the creativity, collective will and determination of the international community, to solve some of the world's most pressing problems and contribute to sustainable peace and prosperity.

That vision remains as relevant today as it was seven decades ago. Our continued commitment to that vision is reflected not only in the growth of the Organisation in terms of its membership, but also in terms of its responsiveness to the changing needs of its members and the international community. Now more than ever, UNESCO plays an increasingly defining role in pursuit of a more diversified, dynamic and inclusive global agenda.

This milestone in UNESCO's history occurs at a crucial moment for the international community. It coincides with the international efforts to chart a new global agenda for sustainable development and to reach a legally binding consensus on climate change.

Mr. President, the global effort to elaborate an inclusive Post-2015 Development Agenda is a poignant reminder of our capacities as humans for a compassion which transcends national boundaries. This humanism resonates with millions of people, who sadly, still live in extreme poverty or otherwise marginalised by inequities in global progress and the fruits of

prosperity; with those marginalised by religious intolerance, xenophobia and gender inequality.

With its core mandate to promote international cooperation in education, the sciences, culture, communication and information, UNESCO remains well-placed to play a significant role in the fulfilment of the development aspirations of millions around the world. This is exemplified in its leadership in three seminal programmes: Culture for the Future; Education for All; and Sciences for the Future.

Mr. President, we are all agreed that a post-2015 Development Agenda without a cultural component would be incomplete and indeed inconsistent with international recognition of culture as a driver and enabler of sustainable development.

As a country whose culture transcends national boundaries, Jamaica recognizes UNESCO's invaluable role in promoting the cultural and creative industries as key drivers of development. The cultural and creative industries are a significant contributor to Jamaica's GDP. Indeed, a National Cultural and Creative Industries Commission was established last year to undertake the development and implementation of a policy and master plan for the sector.

Mr. President, the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States held in September last year in Samoa focused the world's attention on a group of countries that remain a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities.

I refer, in particular, to their vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change. Perhaps more than others, SIDS have a vested interest in a legally binding agreement emanating from COP21 in Paris later this month. An agreement that includes innovative and sustainable climate change financing that will enable our countries as well as development partners, such as UNESCO, to continue their efforts to boost climate education as well as capacity for adaptation and mitigation.

While we lament the demise of the dedicated SIDS Intersectoral Platform due to the financial crisis facing the Organisation, Jamaica commends UNESCO for its creativity in responding to the unique vulnerabilities of small island developing states and welcomes the priority attention that continues to be accorded to SIDS in UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy.

Mr. President, the Government of Jamaica is deeply committed to improving our people's lives and ensuring prosperity and sustainable development. These efforts have been aided, in no small part, by UNESCO's active engagement in Jamaica. I should mention that this year, the Jamaica National Commission for UNESCO celebrates its 50th anniversary.

We are appreciative of UNESCO's continuing focus on social inclusion, on building the skills of our people through technical and vocational education and training (TVET); on supporting our efforts to ensure greater gender balance; on eradicating illiteracy and poverty; and on promoting youth empowerment and science and innovation.

Mr. President, at the 39th Session of the of the World Heritage Committee in Bonn in July, Jamaica was honoured and

privileged to have its first site, the Blue and John Crow Mountains, inscribed on the World Heritage List, the first mixed site in the Caribbean sub-region and one of 32 in the world. We are mindful of the trust placed in us to protect and preserve this unique landscape as part of the common heritage of mankind.

Mr. President, two generations ago UNESCO was established on the belief that “the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern.” This belief remains as valid today as it did in 1945.

I therefore end by renewing the Government of Jamaica’s commitment to and support for UNESCO in advancing the progress of our community of nations as well as to our shared values of peace and prosperity for the benefit of present and future generations.

Thank You.