

WORDS OF THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION OF PANAMA, IN THE 38° GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR THE EDUCATION, SCIENCE And CULTURE (UNESCO), PRONOUNCED IN ITS HEADQUARTERS OF PARIS, FRANCE, ON 4 NOVEMBER 2015.

MR.PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE
MR.PRESIDENT OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL
MADAM DIRECTOR-GENERAL
DISTINGUISHED DELEGATES
LADIES and GENTLEMEN

This time, we address to this distinguished audience on behalf of the Republic of Panama, to present the vision of the Panamanian State in educational matters, and declare our commitment to the Declaration of Incheon, Korea 2015, “Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all”.

There is a broad consensus in our country that a quality education is the only way to enhance the people capabilities, increase revenues, and reduce inequality. We share the vision of a human-centered education, defending their dignity and their fundamental rights, with social justice regarding to their cultural, linguistic, and ethnic diversity.

The economic growth in Panama has been one of the highest in Latin America during the recent decade, Even so, we are a country with a relatively high inequality. Weaknesses in education and human capital development persist in Panama, and they are one of our most important strategies

President Juan Carlos Varela´s, Government Strategic Plan, for the 2015-2019 period, prioritizes attention to enormous social challenges.

Among the main actions taken by the Panamanian Government in the educational field, we can remark the following:

- Strengthening of the program “Universal Scholarship”, in which elementary students receive an monthly economic aid of US30, pre-media students US40, high school students and low-cost private school students US50. This scholarship benefits more than 550,000 students.
- Improved the quality of educational facilities. Through the "My School First" program, the Ministry of Education wants to upgrade each school condition, with all the facilities for an effective learning process, Private companies have been invited to join this initiative with successful result. The Panamanian Government has also launched an aggressive initiative to eliminate "Hut schools", located mainly in indigenous areas.
- Expansion of coverage in the preschool and middle levels. The goal is to build 50 new middle schools, as well as 2000 new classrooms for preschool level.
- The educational improvement effort is not only limited to the infrastructure; preparing our young people with the competencies

that will enable them to successfully address the challenges of the present and future, are also a priority for our Government. Our government has undertaken three major initiatives:

- The Panama Bilingual Program which seeks to provide official schools with a quality education in both the English and Spanish languages. Ten thousand teachers will be trained in the English language until reaching a certification. These teachers will be enrolled in an intensive training for a year, which includes 4 months of immersion in an English speaking country. They will be subsequently inserted in the elementary schools of the country.
- The Learning the Most Program: This program features four action axes. **First, "Reasoning to the Maximum"** transforms and improves the teaching of mathematics,. **Second, "Understanding the Most"** seeks students' improvement of reading comprehension levels and developing their interest in reading. **Third, "Discovering the Most"** provides the science education a focus of inquiry. **Fourth, "Living to the Fullest"** reinforces all the other elements that promotes an integral formation of childhood:
- Technical education articulation and creation of non-university higher technical institutes.. Non-university colleges are established to offer new technical courses of two years, with the possibility of continuing a university education. Certification of technical skills is incorporated.
- Other important lines of action are oriented to strengthen the inclusive education in the country to establish standards for the care of infants 0 to 3 years, and to the attention of young defectors of the school system.

- Improving the quality of education will not be a reality in the country if we do not improve the initial training and continuing education for our teachers. Establishing a modern Teacher Training Institute and strengthen the university centers where teachers receive initial training is a priority
- Another important component to achieve new standards in education is improving the principals' management of school as well as the supervisors' through more efficient trainings and performance evaluation mechanisms. For this we create the Leadership Institute.
- the proposal of a national system of assessment that includes measurements of learning outcomes, for the participation in Pisa 2018 testing

On behalf of the Panamanian Government, I want to thank and acknowledge UNESCO for its support and the work they do on education. We enthusiastically participate in the recognition of studies, certificates and degrees off higher education in Latin America, in order to improve the training and professional growth of teachers in education for early childhood in Central America which seeks to declare Decade of EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE. It has also been valuable for our country to participate at the TERCE report a joint effort by OREAL -UNESCO.

I would like to mention with great satisfaction the signing on October 30th, of a Memorandum of Understanding on Loan of Personnel between Mrs Irina Bokova Director General of UNESCO and HE Mrs Isabel de Saint Malo de Alvarado, Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Panama, which will be of great benefit for our Institutions as well as for the UNESCO.

The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in coordination with other institutions will continue to monitor the preservation, dissemination, promotion and protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage of Panama inscribed on the World Heritage list of the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture, (UNESCO): Among which are the Fortifications on the Caribbean Side of Panama: Portobelo-San Lorenzo; the Archaeological Site of Panama Viejo and Historic District of Panama; Darien National Park; Coiba National Park and its Special Zone of Marine Protection, and the Talamanca Range-La Amistad Reserves / La Amistad National Park.

Thank you