

36th UNESCO General Conference

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UNESCO Headquarters, Paris

Madam President,

Director-General of UNESCO,

Honourable Ministers,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

It is indeed my honour and privilege to address this Assembly.

Madame Katalin Bogyay, please allow me to congratulate you for your election as President of the 36th Session of the General Conference. We are confident that under your able leadership, this Session will be very successful.

Madam President,

Investment in Education

The winds of change that are blowing across the Continent, the conflicts in some parts of the world and the recent global economic downturn, present us all, governments and international bodies alike, with acute challenges. In the face of such turmoil, education is pivotal to strengthen social cohesion and reinforce economic advancement.

Mauritius considers investment in education as investment in sustainable national development and a legacy for its future generations. Mauritius has increased the budget for the Education and Training sectors. Education is now the second largest recipient of our national budget.

Madam President,

Internet and Education

Nobody can deny that globalization and rapid technological changes have made knowledge a critical determinant of competitiveness in the world economy. The impact on education is clear and this has led UNESCO to give a high priority to the use of ICT in Education. While the internet presents several challenges, in the process it also offers tremendous opportunities in the achievement of “Education for All” goals in terms of improving access and quality of education.

With this in mind, Mauritius has initiated several new projects with a view to bringing technology into the education system. One such project is the “Sankoré Project”, which aims to bring down all digital barriers and transform the teaching and learning environment into an interactive one, right from the early years of primary education. This Initiative, will enable Mauritius to develop an important bilingual E-learning platform for both the African Continent and the Indian Ocean region. We hope, this will pave the way, for the sharing of digital learning materials with both Francophone and Anglophone Countries.

Madam President,

We are aware that from the very outset, UNESCO's activity in the basic sciences has remained steadfast. Great emphasis has been placed on the promotion of a science culture as a precursor of a knowledge-based society worldwide. In Mauritius, we have started, as early as in the Pre-primary to kindle the imagination of the very young with "science for fun".

In order to broaden the student's outlook and build up scientific literacy of the whole society, students not reading for any pure science subjects will be given the opportunity to study a new subject called 'Science for all'.

The issue of mother tongue

The mosaic of languages is indeed one of the richest treasures we have in Mauritius. The Government has successfully completed all the ground work for the introduction of two heritage languages, namely, the '**Kreol Morisien**' and '**Bhojpurî**', as optional subjects in schools as from January 2012.

Climate Change & Sustainable Development

Small Island States are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Mauritius has since 2008 witnessed a rise in the sea level and we are currently facing the worst drought in our history, leaving many sectors water stressed. The vision of our Prime Minister to transform Mauritius into a sustainable

island-“**Maurice Ile Durable**” (MID) aims to make Mauritius a model of sustainable development, particularly in the context of **SIDS**.

We are now adopting a new approach to infrastructural development through the construction of Green schools with a view to promoting sustainable development. Likewise, the installation of photovoltaic cells in primary and secondary schools has also started and has given an added dimension to our strategy to develop a sustainable environment.

Mauritius strongly believes that the most valuable heritage that we must ensure to preserve for the future generations is Planet Earth itself. Mauritius fully supports the UNESCO Global Action on Climate Change programme that aims to cope with this global issue.

Madam President,

Mauritius Africa Initiative

Early childhood development is the key driver to learner achievement as it lays the very foundation for all future learning. Mauritius is thus committed to the provision of Pre-school education to all children. We have spared no efforts to reach out, the few ‘out-of- school’ children, who without doubt came from the vulnerable segment of the population.

This is an experience that Mauritius wishes to share with the region through the Mauritius Africa Initiative. Under this Initiative, capacities of Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries in young child integrated programming will be

reinforced through the setting up of a regional platform for capacity building programmes and exchange of best practices.

The vision of the Mauritius-Africa Initiative (MAI) is to contribute to the achievement of the Education For ALL (EFA) goals and Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as well as strengthening the Convention of the Rights of the Child in the Sub-Saharan African region. This initiative is also in line with UNESCO's Priority Africa Agenda.

Cultural Diversity

UNESCO is celebrating this year the 10th Anniversary of the adoption of Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Ten years is an important milestone. It was here during the 31st Session of the General Conference that the Declaration was unanimously adopted. Indeed, cultural diversity is an immanent strength and we are blessed in Mauritius to have a rainbow nation. Intercultural dialogue remains an everyday fact of life.

World Heritage Committee

Mauritius has inscribed two Cultural Properties on the World Heritage List – namely the 'Aapravasi Ghat' in July 2006 and the 'Le Morne' Cultural Landscape in July 2008.

Mauritius is working on the preparation of its third nomination, the Black River Gorges National Park, which is a natural site.

African World Heritage Fund (AWHF)

Since the setting up of the AWHF, a boost has been given to the promotion, preservation and conservation of World Heritage in Africa.

Indeed, the technical and financial assistance provided to the States Parties has allowed the removal of sites from the List in Danger at the last meeting of the World Heritage Committee in June 2011. Further, an increased number of properties was inscribed on the World Heritage List at the same Session.

Mauritius has been amongst the first African States to have made a financial contribution to the AWHF and we wish to invite Member States to contribute to the AWHF to maintain its sustainability.

Madam President,

Thank you for your attention.

