

GOVERNMENT OF BARBADOS

Statement to the 34th session of the General Conference of UNESCO, Paris, France, to be delivered by the Hon. Anthony Wood., M.P., Minister of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports on October 22nd, 2007

Mr. President, as Barbados is taking the floor for the first time in this debate, let me offer congratulations to you on your election to this prestigious office. Barbados welcomes Montenegro as a new member to UNESCO and congratulates Singapore on its much anticipated return to this august body.

EUDCATION

President, whereas Barbados commends UNESCO for its efforts in facilitating the achievement of the EFA educational goals, there continues to be an area of concern for which assistance is required. Barbados has made significant strides with respect to the elimination of gender disparity in the enrolment of the sexes at the primary and secondary levels. However, Barbados, like its Caribbean neighbours, continues to experience gender disparity in favour of females in two ways. More females than males enter tertiary level institutions and in terms of quality educational outcomes, more female than male students leave secondary school better academically qualified.

There is a dire need for teacher training in Gender Equity in schools and classrooms so that neither gender is disadvantaged by school policies and poor teacher-student relations, as some regional research indicates. Educational institutions also require assistance in providing compensatory strategies for socially disadvantaged girls and boys. At the same time my Government is delighted to acknowledge the recent launch of the UNESCO Caribbean Education Statistics Capacity-Building Project, generously supported by the Japan Funds -in-Trust as well as UNESCO, to be housed at UN House in Barbados. This new initiative will go a long way to addressing the ability to collect statistical data and verifying the accuracy of these and their analysis in

light of many of the factors which create these conditions in the Caribbean.

SCIENCE

Barbados is pleased with the recognition given to the work of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, as the leading body on oceans and coasts within the United Nations System. The small islands of the Caribbean have benefited substantially from the programmes executed at the regional level. However, as a long-standing supporter of IOC, Barbados would wish to express its concern that the vital role played by this body, both in terms of ecosystem conservation and management, as well as climate change and disaster mitigation, may be jeopardized because of a consistent reduction in allocation of funds in recent years. We support the call for further debate on the future of IOC and wish to reiterate our commitment to its current programming, for the improved governance of fragile coasts and oceans upon which so many of our island economies are based.

Barbados also commends UNESCO on the proposed water management projects. As a densely populated, water-scarce country the focus on systems under stress is useful, and we hope that small islands like ours, whose challenges lie in saltwater intrusion into coastal aquifers, accelerating extraction rates and limited national capacity for constantly effective water resources management, will be given special consideration in this biennium.

Barbados has been an active participant in several environmental conventions under the United Nations, and as we seek to enhance our participation in the Caribbean region and by extension, the greater global community, we have sought to harmonize natural and cultural heritage management and policy arrangements in this regard. The proposed establishment of our National Park System which accounts for one seventh of our land mass is a graphic example of this. Within this defined area special attention will be paid to the livelihoods of the communities, and the unique nature of the landscape. The area exists

today because of our special work in combating land degradation, and the enhancement of Biodiversity.

The grave consequences of climate change cannot be stressed enough, especially in respect of islands, where the impacts are keenly felt and the mitigation efforts lie almost entirely outside of our control. Therefore the thread of climate change that links the elements of the natural science programme together: addressing disaster mitigation, development of ocean observing systems that will capture, inter alia, sea level rise, and the efforts to strengthen governance of freshwater systems, must not be broken. Many future lives and livelihoods depend on it.

CULTURE

Barbados certainly welcomes the adoption in March this year, of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions. This Convention is, in its intent, revolutionary, for it is formal acknowledgement of the fact that cultural products must not be seen as mere commodities, for they embody the very meaning, the values and beliefs of the world's diverse cultures. For small developing states like my own, the Convention holds the key to what could truly be "sustainable development". It will facilitate the "management" of our increasingly multicultural societies through ensuring that there is global accessibility to the wide range of cultural expressions which we have to offer. For there is no doubt that it is exposure to these cultural expressions which will facilitate an understanding of and a respect for, cultures other than our own.

It is also fortuitous that in the very act of disseminating our cultural products, there can be substantial economic benefits. If Member States adhere to the terms of this Convention, particularly those more developed states, it will allow us to develop to the fullest our cultural and creative industries. This will allow developing countries to participate fully in this globalized world of free trade

and open markets. For while we may never be competitors in the area of manufacturing, history has shown that because of our incredibly rich and diverse cultures, we can compete, and even have a distinct advantage, in the cultural industries.

HERITAGE

Barbados wholeheartedly subscribes to the view that heritage serves the triple role “as a foundation of identity, a vector for development, and a tool for reconciliation” as stated in the draft Programme and Budget for 2008-2009. My delegation actively endorses the organisation’s renewed commitment to the preservation of the cultural heritage. We particularly welcome the reinforcement of these activities through the active application of UNESCO’s standard setting instruments in this field. In addition, their improved coordination, the collection of related statistical data, the inventorizing of cultural resources and the building of capacities, in cooperation with the specialized institutions, namely the International Centre for Conservation at Rome and the International Council of Museums. Barbados views as critical the mobilization of resources to assist developing countries with the operationalization of the international conventions for the protection of the cultural heritage .In this regard Barbados hopes to establish the necessary legislative framework to provide the foundation for its response to these conventions by the end of this year.

Barbados values the reinforcement given to the World Heritage Committee’s four (4) strategic objectives being: Credibility, Conservation, Capacity building and Communication. We endorse the development of regional strategies, and particularly those actions and strategies geared towards the needs of Small Island Developing States, in particular “building capacities to prevent and mitigate the threats and impacts” inherent in climate change and natural disasters to which these states are so vulnerable. At the same time improving

the skills necessary at the community level for “managing sustainable tourism initiatives in natural and cultural sites” is a vital factor in achieving success in these areas. Barbados has much constructive experience in this regard and stands ready to actively participate in addressing these issues and seeking innovative and supportive strategies with the World Heritage Centre to increase the value of heritage protection on a global level.

Barbados supports the view that professional networks and partnerships must be strengthened to improve the educational content of museums. Barbados particularly endorses the recognition given to the role of museums within societies, whether developed or developing, “as sites for the production of, access to and dissemination of knowledge and culture, and as vectors of social cohesion and human and economic development”. Indeed over the last five years my government has paid specific attention to the development of new museums within the island to give voice to these perspectives.

Mr. President, Barbados will not be satisfied with mere posturing with respect to the advancement of the Slave Route Project, where serious and concrete action is required to ensure its prominence within the spectrum of UNESCO’s activities. It is critical to preserving the organization’s integrity in respect of “Breaking the Silence” regarding this heinous event that acknowledgement be given to the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Transatlantic Slave Trade in this year of 2007. Colonial patterns of authority, destruction and power which have so structured our history must be constructively utilized as a legitimate foundation upon which to build new national and regional identities within the areas affected.

SPORTS

Barbados has a history of significant involvement and contribution to the International Anti-doping effort. At present, Barbados represents the Central American and Caribbean region on the Foundation Board of the World Anti-

doping Agency (WADA). We are also host of the Caribbean Regional Anti-doping Organisation which provides assistance to fourteen (14) Caribbean countries with Anti-doping education, testing, training and current issues.

Barbados is signatory to the International Convention against Doping in Sports adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in 2005. During the coming weeks, Barbados expects to enact legislation to enforce the provisions of the Convention and the revised World Anti-doping Code. Barbados pledges to continue in the vanguard of the movement against Anti-doping in sports and the promotion of healthy competition in keeping with the true spirit of sports.

SOCIAL SCIENCES

Barbados along with the other countries in the Caribbean, is committed to the eradication of poverty as one of their primary development objectives. This is in congruence with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) signed by all CARICOM member countries at the Millennium Summit in 2000. Over the past three decades, CARICOM countries at the national and regional levels placed great effort in managing human and social development as an integral part of the development challenges facing Small Island Developing States(SIDS). Poverty however, remains a serious issue for the region

Globalization and trade liberalization pose major challenges for the countries of the Caribbean and have exacerbated the poverty situation especially in countries dependent on agricultural based products. Any programme designed to address this situation must integrate "social vulnerability" as part of the operational framework of programmes and projects. While economic and environmental vulnerability has been the experience of the Caribbean, there is uncertainty concerning the concept of social vulnerability and its relevance to the policy debate. Social vulnerability must therefore be a critical part of the

construct when programmes on social protection are designed to buffer unexpected events.

COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION

Mr. President, the work of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) which concluded with the Tunis Agenda for the Information Society (2005) clearly establishes the importance of Communication and Information for and in today's world. Communication and Information lay at the heart of every endeavour of life today. Communication technologies have provided access to information at unprecedented rates and speed. This is accompanied by quite significant drops in charges associated with these technologies compared with even that which existed 10 years ago.

WSIS's core message – “building knowledge societies” provides a unique opportunity for small- island developing states such as Barbados to compete in today's globalized world on a playing field that is considerably flatter. The use of what is often the only natural resource of such states – the knowledge, skills and competencies of their people – enables states that have been historically challenged in many other areas to compete on equal terms with their global partners and/or competitors. Indeed, while WSIS was an initiative of UNESCO's Communication and Information Sector, its recommendations have implications for every aspect of UNESCO's mission. WSIS has undoubtedly demonstrated how central communication and information are to every facet of life.

WSIS's four key principles – freedom of expression; universal access to information and knowledge; respect for cultural and linguistic diversity; and quality education for all – resonate not only with UNESCO's goals and objectives but also with my Government's vision with respect to these four key areas of civil society. It is for this reason that Barbados sees the

recommendations of WSIS as being very valuable for the long term development of all states.

With respect to the Memory of the World programme Barbados certainly endorses the initiatives as outlined in the programme and budget, and expects to play a key role over the next biennium when it welcomes member states to Barbados for the next International Advisory Meeting scheduled for July 2009.

Finally, Mr. President UNESCO continues to be well placed to coordinate strategies for the implementation of programmes and projects at the country level. However to make UNESCO's work more impactful we are currently reviewing the institutional arrangements within my ministry. We anticipate that this review will result in more dedicated treatment being given to UNESCO matters, and a strengthening of our relationship with UNESCO's regional offices . Such efforts well undoubtedly redound to the benefit of Barbados as we seek to access further support from UNESCO in its specialized areas, while at the same preparing us to give reciprocal support to UNESCO's own restructuring within the framework of the one UN commitment.

Thank you for your attention today.