

GRENADA
Address to the
Leaders Forum at the 36th session of the General Conference of UNESCO
26 October, 2011
Prime Minister Tillman Thomas
Grenada

Madam President of the 36th session of the General Conference,

Madam Chair of the Executive Board,

Madam Director-General,

Heads of State and Government,

Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

Madam President,

Allow me to offer my heartfelt congratulations to you upon your election as President of the 36th session of the General Conference and wish you every success during your presidency!

I am confident that you will guide this session to a great, successful, outcome.

I also take this opportunity to pay tribute to Dr. Davidson Hepburn, President of the 35th session of the General Conference, the first President from our Caribbean Community (CARICOM), for having carried out his duties at this level with dignity, and with a consensual spirit. His election to the position, confirmed the determination of Member States to change the status quo, by choosing someone from a Small Island Developing State of CARICOM, to assume this important responsibility in UNESCO; and indeed someone from the Latin American and Caribbean Group 3, the GRULAC.

Today we are gathered here to consider how UNESCO's action could create, develop and promote the pathways to lasting peace and sustainable development.

Established to construct "the defences of peace, in the minds of men", and women, through international cooperation in education, sciences, culture, communication and information, the ideals of the UNESCO remain most relevant for strengthening

Member States solidarity, and contributing to peace and security, through the promotion of a Culture of Peace, and for Sustainable development.

Madam President, achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 has been recognized as one of the best ways to lay the foundations for sustainable development.

Unfortunately, the global economic crisis has accentuated the many challenges, and obstacles, to the attainment of these Goals. Moreover, this has had dire consequences for developing countries, and in particular, for Grenada's economy, and many Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Thus our march towards the achievement of our desired goals, has been considerably slowed.

Sustainable development requires an ethical framework for a sustainable world, involving the simultaneous pursuit of economic prosperity, environmental quality, and sociopolitical sustainability.

Thus, building a Culture of Peace, is a prerequisite for reaching socio-economic equity, and sustainable development.

Madam President, how then can we build a culture of peace?

What strategies and initiatives can be developed to foster a culture of peace and nonviolence as well as sustainable models of development?

(The power of education)

It is an accepted view that education is not only a human right, but also a prerequisite for sustainable development, and an essential tool for good governance, informed decisions and for the promotion of democracy. As such, it is essential to integrate, at all levels of the education system, the values of a culture of peace, the principles of equality, freedom, justice and democracy, respect of all human rights, tolerance, reconciliation, solidarity and promotion of intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding.

Similarly, developing education for sustainable development also requires a special focus on climate change and disaster risk reduction and prevention. This leads to a greater awareness, and to new ways of thinking, new social and ethical attitudes, and innovative responses, to our most pressing contemporary challenges.

In this context, may I propose that UNESCO should deepen the partnership with Member States in their efforts to transform education systems at all levels. This is necessary for accelerating progress towards Education For All (EFA), lifelong learning, attaining quality education, and developing skills for the world of work through curriculum reform; carrying out policy reviews and the further development of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), including green jobs, and higher education, to meet the demands of the 21st century.

Madam President, in this era of globalization, the world cannot genuinely prosper with inequalities between regions, and priority should continue to be given to Africa for building a **Strategy for African Prosperity.** Special attention should also be given to the needs of priority groups of countries such as the Least Developed Countries and Small Islands Developing States. This is absolutely necessary to allow them to address the unique conditions that render them disadvantaged.

Likewise, a global society cannot maximize its true potential with inequality among its members. Hence, attention must be paid to **gender equality**, as a fundamental pillar for peace.

Girls and women currently make up to 70% of the world's one billion poorest people, and the majority of the 793 million illiterate adults. As stated by Ms. Irina Bokova Director-General of UNESCO in her message on the occasion of the International Literacy Day, "Literacy is a prerequisite for peace because it carries multiple benefits, cutting across the human, cultural, social,

political and economic spheres. In today's knowledge driven societies, lack of literacy is more than ever synonymous with exclusion and marginalization”.

Given that one of UNESCO's, global strategies is gender equality, the Organisation should intensify its action in promoting education of girls and women at all levels of the Education System.

This would be timely following the recent award of the Nobel Peace Prize jointly to three women, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkul Karman for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work.

Advocating for gender equality also requires that specific attention be given to the needs and contributions of **young males** in our Caribbean societies, where disproportionate number of males, are confronted by underachievement, poverty, violence and exclusion. We expect UNESCO to develop strategies to address the

emerging social and ethical challenges of the twenty-first century, by supporting Member States in the development of social science knowledge, and elaborating forward-looking and inclusive approaches and policies, to respond to social transformations, and promote social inclusion.

Madam President, our Youth also want their voices to be heard and to be responsible actors in their various societies!. As such, it would be critical to empower them, to allow them to initiate social change, and to be active participants in determining their own future.

Today, our youth are interconnected and are constantly communicating and playing key roles bringing change to their societies via the social media. Thus, it is important that the potential of the free, independent and pluralistic media, and especially the new social media, be harnessed.

This is consistent with Agenda 21, which clearly identifies information, integration, and participation as

key building blocks, to help countries achieve development. The media, in all forms, can serve as a bridge between cultures and societies. Consequently I suggest that UNESCO should intensify its action in favour of building **knowledge societies**.

UNESCO's mandate to contribute to bridging the digital divide by fostering information and communication capacity for universal access, **freedom of expression** and freedom of the press; notably through the International Programme for the Development of Communications and the Information for All Programme, should be actively pursued.

Madam President, the global environmental and ecological crisis manifested in climate change, **biodiversity** loss, oceanic over-exploitation and degradation, desertification, fresh water shortages and sea level rises, highlights the need for new approaches to the management of our resources. Our approach should involve cross-sectoral coordination, and integration of environmental and social concerns into all

development processes, as well as broad public participation in decision making to generate responsible behaviors.

In this regard, the participation of UNESCO in the preparation of **the Rio + 20** Conference to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June 2012, is of utmost importance!

The Organisation's contribution in its main fields of competence, namely governance, education for sustainable development and ethical aspects of sciences should be reinforced.

This will be a major opportunity, to rethink policies and approaches, taking into consideration the needs of all stakeholders, in particular, the most vulnerable societies in Africa, and island economies. It is expected that embracing the concept of inclusive blue/green societies will be considered in a realistic way.

Madam President, the role of the oceans is of strategic importance in this environmental crisis! An integrated, responsible management of the oceans, and an improved global ocean governance framework, are also prerequisites for the sustainable use of these resources. The implementation of Early Warning Systems for Tsunamis and other marine hazards, is necessary to prevent disasters such as the ones witnessed recently in Japan and other countries. UNESCO should seek to mobilize the necessary funds for the installation, in all regions, of Early Warning Systems, and in particular in the Caribbean, where only 20% of the extra-budgetary funds have been secured presently for this project.

In this respect, I am happy that Grenada was able to host the UNESCO – IOC workshop on "Strengthening sea-level observation network and coordination activities in the Caribbean" in January this year. For small island countries such as we have in the Caribbean, this could mean the difference between survival, and total destruction of our populations.

In all its considerations, GRULAC must reflect all perspectives or perhaps due consideration should be given to sub-grouping which would facilitate such process.

(The Power of Culture for Peace and Development)

Madam President, Culture can be a mainspring for the sustainable development of people, communities, and nations. Developing a solid cultural policy and advocating a cultural dimension in all public policies are critical.

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As a result, we applaud the signal importance of UNESCO's action, in favour of protection and promotion of Heritage and Cultural Expressions! In particular, the Organisation's mandate through its normative action, and the implementation of its main conventions namely,:

- the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,
- the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage,

- the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression and
 - the Convention for the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage,
- must be translated into meaningful tangible actions .

As these conventions are becoming more and more recognized and effective, it is time now for UNESCO to work towards regional and sub regional equity. The Organisation should now focus on more capacity building, and innovative actions, to assist these countries and regions to maximize the potential benefits from these instruments.

(Science for a Culture of Peace)

Madam President, science too can play a role for a Culture of Peace by proposing innovative solutions to challenges encountered. Providing science-based knowledge, building science capacities for research, training and the popularization of science in development-oriented areas, as well as sharing the

transfer of scientific information, is a collective and ethical responsibility, bearing in mind, the borderless nature of the global environmental crises.

It is important that UNESCO redoubles its efforts in this area, assisting in providing solutions to the new challenges which affect the lives and livelihoods of so many people worldwide.

(Addressing Climate Change and Natural Disasters)

The increased number of natural disasters resulting from Climate Change, which impact all regions of the world, represents a great threat to global prosperity and security! The special needs of small islands, some of them in danger of extinction, and those of vulnerable groups, in particular those living in coastal zones, should be taken into consideration.

A holistic approach, taking into account the scientific, educational, cultural and ethical dimensions, should be translated into concrete initiatives by all stakeholders.

The ethical dimension of science and technology must be highlighted, and Grenada attaches great importance to the development of policies in the ethics of science and technology, in particular to UNESCO's continued work concerning ethical principles in relation to climate change. The Organisation should further mobilize science, technology and innovation for sustainable development, and natural disaster risk reduction and mitigation.

Madame President, ladies and Gentlemen, **Small Islands Developing States** (SIDS) are confronted by environmental degradation, and UNESCO's contribution to the Mauritius Strategy for the Sustainable Development of SIDS should be developed through innovative, strategic and targeted contributions adapted to their specific needs and in an inter-sectoral approach involving the active engagement of all Major Programmes - education, science, culture and ICT.

Consistent with UNESCO's Constitution which clearly states that "peace must be established on the basis of intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind", member States should recognize that more **solidarity and international cooperation** is needed, to allow UNESCO to carry out its mission.

To achieve solidarity in a transforming world, UNESCO also needs to be more efficient, more focused and to be able to reshape itself; adapting to an era where multilateral cooperation is faced with increased demands and increased austerity.

The results and recommendations of the Independent External Evaluation of UNESCO, and the recommendations of the Ad-Hoc Working Group established by the Executive Board, present an opportunity to adapt to the realities of the Twenty first century, and to play its role as an agent of change within the United Nations.

In this regard, we welcome the proposal to extend the Programme and Budget of UNESCO from two to four years and its Medium Term Strategy from four to eight years. This will allow UNESCO to align its planning cycles with the United Nations' Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR).

Madam President,

The "defences of peace are constructed in the minds" of men and women! They are also constructed in the precincts of International Organisations!

By recommending to the General Conference to admit Palestine's membership to UNESCO, the Executive Board has taken a courageous decision consistent with its mandate. Its admission as a member of the Organisation, will allow Palestine and Israel to work together, by a commitment to sustained security and democracy, to building a culture of peace and sustainable development through the power of UNESCO's mandate.

What we now need is a new global commitment from all Member States, to tackle the challenges we face, and to make the most of the transformative power of education, science, culture, and communication and information.

Together we can make that difference.

I wish to highly commend UNESCO for its outstanding achievements over the years and indeed the further growth it has been experiencing under the leadership of its first women Director General,

You can count on our continued support,

I thank you.