

By: the minister of Tourism and Culture Minister Otmar Oduber

Cada ken cu su forza esey ta un realidad. Tur hende tin un sombra hasta den scuridad. Hende ta keda hende no ban lubida . Si e zapato unta sirbibo bo tey cana forza...

Dear Madam Bokova, Director General of UNESCO

Dear Sir Stanley Mutumba, President of the General Conference

Your Excellencies

Ladies and Gentleman,

It is with great honor that I , Otmar Oduber the Minister of Culture of Aruba, direct myself towards you at the 38th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO. (Bare with me since I am your second last speech of the day). The words that I have expressed have been written in Papiamentu.

Originating from an Aruban song, their significance is a reflection of the message that I hope to share with you today:

We all have our strengths, that is a reality. Everyone has a shadow even in the darkest of places. People will remain people, please let's never forget. If the shoe doesn't fit you, you won't be able to walk straight.

Beforehand let me state that I admire, applaud and support the institution that is UNESCO. 70 years striving to build lasting peace on the basis of intellectual solidarity and the promotion of collaboration, is the source of inspiration for many countries including mine. It is no simple task to connect and to coordinate 204 nations striving to adhere towards a collective vision. It is only logic that at times this collective vision is reassessed in order to insure that every country feels represented by it.

In the case of Aruba, an island in the Caribbean, I can tell you that we are quite similar as well as quite different compared to many countries attending this conference. A small island home to approximately 110.000 inhabitants, Aruba is primarily known for its booming tourism industry. Our pristine beaches , year round sunny weather and service driven people have been the attraction for many visitors for more than two decades. Residing within the Dutch Kingdom, Aruba has obtained its independent status in 1986. Fortunate enough to be a worthy partner within this Kingdom, Aruba is also very proud of its autonomous voice.

Although not unfamiliar to worldly challenges, Aruba has known no wars, no heavy conflicts, no natural disasters. We count our blessings every day... Does this mean that we are better off than other countries? Should we be considered exemplary?

Ladies and gentleman ,

Please allow me to share some thoughts with you in regards one topics I believe best reflect my message. I would like to address the intangible cultural heritage of Aruba and local efforts for the safeguarding hereof.

Considering the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, it can be mentioned that the Dutch Kingdom has ratified the associated convention in 2012. Aruba as part of the Dutch Kingdom also has the duty to comply with the rules of this convention. Article 13 of the Convention states that; *in order to ensure the safeguarding , development and promotion of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory each State Party shall endeavor to amongst others: designate or establish one or more competent bodies for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage.* Do not get me wrong as my intention is not to repeat information that is already known to you nor is it to waste your time. Yet the previously described sentence is but an example of the challenges Aruba has encountered during its ratification process.

As required by the convention, it has not been possible for our island to designate or establish a competent body for the safeguarding of our intangible heritage. Reason being that it is simply not feasible to acquire the local expertise and funding to do so. Perhaps you may call it a matter of prioritization. We often get quite inspired after visiting such conferences as this one, were you get to meet colleagues and other professionals that understand what the priorities are on an international level. Yet when we return to our daily realities who are we to solely decide what the most pressing issues are? It is not always easy to sit at the table and advocate for culture, when stark budget cuts are a current trend for most of us. It becomes even more difficult when you are part of a potent yet small nation.

As Madam Albright once said ‘ Do resolutions have teeth and if they do, do they bite?’. Hereby showing the stark contrast between a diplomatic environment and our daily realities.

Does this mean that Aruba as a nation will cease to strive to ratify this convention? No, we will call upon our partners , friends and allies to provide us with perhaps new insights that enable us to reach this collective objective... and I will sit at the table again, as long as it takes. I will also call upon UNESCO to recognize that these challenges are often characteristics of smaller nations and that prioritization of the SIDS should become a reality. We need shoes that fit!

Before I end my speech I would like to state that, although there are some matters to be addressed, I trust we will find strength and inspiration by working together.

Thank you.