



**National Policy Statement
of the British Virgin Islands
at the General Policy Debate of the November 2015**

Friday 6th November, 2015 (AM)

*Delivered by the Minister of Education & Culture and Chairman of the BVI
National Commission for UNESCO the Honourable Myron V. Walywn*

- Mr. President of the General Conference
- Excellences
- President of the Executive Council
- Director General
- Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations
- Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning,

I am honoured to be here this morning to deliver this address and I will first begin by congratulating you Mr. President on behalf of the Government and people of the Virgin Islands on becoming the 38th President of the General Conference.

The Virgin Islands applaud Director General, Madame Irina Bokova for her call on us to celebrate UNESCO in its progress in education, science, culture and communication, and we also fully endorse UNESCO's key mission, which is to "contribute to the building of peace, and the alleviation of poverty". This must be central to all our work programmes beyond 2015.

Mr. President, permit me also to acknowledge the valuable contribution of Professor Hao Ping, President of the 37th General Conference for his unwavering commitment to our initiatives.

We also welcome our sister island of Montserrat to the UNESCO family.

Mr. President, UNESCO prides itself on the mantra Education for All. I am pleased to report that, our Government has been reinvesting and rebuilding the educational sector in this respect. We have been working assiduously to ensure that all citizens, from early years to adulthood, have the avenues through which they can each reach their full potential, to be successful in life, at work and in the community through the core message “***Creating a Culture of Excellence***”.

The Government of the Virgin Islands believes that no real economic and social development is possible particularly in Small Island Developing States without a solid foundation in education. Hence, quality inclusive education at all levels continues to be central to our Territory’s development. Our Government realises that in order for the Virgin Islands to maintain a relevant and vibrant economy, we need to find opportunities to prepare our young people today, so that they can properly take care of their homeland in an uncertain tomorrow and to prepare to be good global citizens.

We fully support UNESCO’s thrust in education in the areas of ICT’s, TVET and Teacher Training and Development. The need for technical and vocational professionals continues to be an area of great need for us in the Virgin Islands. This is why we have provided opportunities for our young people in this area by developing and opening our Territory’s first true technical high school. At the Virgin Islands School of Technical Studies our secondary students have the opportunity to be fully engaged in their chosen fields of interest while earning entry level professional certification. I have met with some of your experts in this field during this conference and will be following up to receive assistance to take our TVET programme even further.

We live in an era where a whiteboard is becoming more relevant than a blackboard, thus, we are in the process of remodeling all schools with a view to fully integrate ICT in the teaching and learning process. In 2014 we started a pilot programme in primary schools with a view that by 2020, all students in the Virgin Islands will be learning in completely wired classrooms and courses will be taught using the technology and tools of the day. We will be calling on UNESCO to support this initiative as we utilise technology to support our students' education.

This year we implemented a major change in our education system – the addition of an extra year of schooling at the secondary level. This gives our students the time needed to master core subjects, develop their analytical and critical thinking skills and to mature as young adults. Our education system now takes students through 12 mandatory years of education – ages 5-17. We anticipate that this move will prepare our students for the academic challenges of tertiary education and the skills needed to gain and maintain employment in our economy.

We see schools and classrooms with strong leadership and quality teachers as the foundation that is needed to create an exciting and engaging environment for our students to be prepared for today's world and beyond. By retraining and licensing our education professionals to meet modern requirements of teaching in this age we expect to see this process enriching the lives of our students and our community and we seek your assistance.

Special needs education is high on our Government's agenda, and we expect to make significant strides in this area. When we speak of the Education for All movement, we speak to the commitment to provide quality education for **all** children, youth and adults. We continue our work on developing our educational system to concentrate on providing even more services for our differently-abled students to be truly included in our society, both academically and socially. We look to UNESCO for expertise to help us to improve in this area so that we can offer our most vulnerable society members the best opportunities for advancement.

Mr. President, the Government of the Virgin Islands believes that UNESCO

is strategically well positioned to assist our sub-region in amplifying intercultural dialogue on the legacy of enslavement and its associated impact on cultural heritage. People without an understanding of how they came into being will be forced to imagine and create a history for themselves and we cannot afford that.

Given the rich history of the Virgin Islands, we have implemented initiatives such as the teaching of Virgin Islands History at all levels and introduced a mandatory National Citizens Service Programme to build and promote the Virgin Islands culture and pride, which we anticipate will have a positive effect propagating the values and achievements that have helped to shape our community. However much more is needed in the preservation of our historical sites, sites that are of global significance and we seek UNESCO's continued help to move sites such as the St. Phillips Church of the Africans and the Nottingham Freed Slave Estate to the Memory of the World and World Heritage.

Madame Director General, this year UNESCO celebrates its' 70th anniversary- on behalf of the Government of the Virgin Islands, I would like to congratulate you on being at the helm at the marking of this significant milestone. We further renew the Virgin Islands' commitment and support for UNESCO to advance the progress of our community of nations and people with a rekindling of hope and vision as we look to the future.

Thank you, Mr. President.