

38th session of the General Conference
General Debate pm 6 November 2015
Statement by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Mr President, Director General, Chair of the Executive Board, Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Mr President, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines congratulates you on your election to the Presidency of the General Conference and wishes you every success.

May I take this opportunity to thank the outgoing President, Mr HAO Ping and the Chair of the Executive Board, Mr Mohammed Sameh Amr, for their outstanding leadership and commitment during their respective tenures.

St Vincent and the Grenadines welcomes Montserrat, our sister Caribbean Island, as an Associate Member of UNESCO.

Mr President, Small Island Developing States are a priority target group for the Organisation. We look to UNESCO to ensure that programmes and activities in all areas of competency meet the needs of this special group of countries and are adequately funded. Our priorities are education and climate change and its negative effects on the islands. We need support in these areas and also to enable us to build inclusive knowledge societies for sustainable development and to protect our heritage and foster creativity.

We therefore welcome UNESCO's Draft Action Plan for SIDS and look forward to adopting it at the 199th session of the Executive Board, with the aim to integrate in the future a mechanism identifying the specific activities that would directly benefit SIDS. We are aware that extrabudgetary funds are needed to cover this action plan. This will require a structured dialogue with the donors.

Mr President, clearly the challenges, both for UNESCO and for Member States, arising from the post-2015 development agenda and the new sustainable development goals are considerable. SIDS will need support if they are to achieve these goals by 2030 and UNESCO is well placed to help provide this through its high-level expertise, capacity-building, policy advice and mutual cooperation.

Goals which are especially important to my country include Goal 4 to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities" and Goal 13 to "take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts". We look forward to UNESCO contributing in a leading and coordination role on education and also to

participating in the delivery of goal 13. In this regard, St Vincent and the Grenadines believes that the functions of IOC are closely linked to Sustainable Development Goals 13 and 14 and that its role should be strengthened.

Mr President, our key challenge remains finding ways to adapt and mitigate climate change. Climate change is reaping havoc on the social and economic life of Caribbean countries. In St Vincent and the Grenadines we recall the destructive floods of December 2013; many homes destroyed, lives lost, roads and other communications disrupted and extensively damaged. We cannot wait for more disasters to strike.

We call upon UNESCO to help us to:

- improve our preparedness ahead of imminent natural disasters through early-warning systems; and
- identify and strengthen scientific communities across the region.

We welcome the 2030 Framework for Action on Education which UNESCO launched in response to Sustainable Development Goal 4. In line with the new targets we call on UNESCO to prioritise quality teaching through appropriate methods, including quality teacher training and development. Our country continues to focus on TVET and the development of skills for the workplace particularly among the youth. We aim to reform TVET so that we have an enhanced and sustainable system.

St Vincent and the Grenadines hopes that efforts will continue to be made to strengthen the relationship between the Secretariat and field offices which are at the centre of delivering UNESCO's mandate. We remind the Secretariat that adequate resources are needed to properly execute plans and programmes; ultimately raising the visibility of the Organisation.

We believe that UNESCO, through its intersectorial action, can contribute more than ever in a world of conflicts. Culture of peace should be a continuous action to encourage more dialogue and reconciliation, and to spread the messages of tolerance and mutual understanding so as to build a better world.

Mr President, I wish to reiterate my country's commitment to UNESCO and pledge continued support to achieving the mandate of this esteemed Organisation.

I thank you.