

38th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO
Speech by the head of the Solomon Islands delegation
Honourable Freda Adelina Belinda Tuki
Minister of Women, Youth Women Youth and Children & Family Affairs
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Mr President,
Madam Director-General,
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr President, let me begin by saying that it is indeed a privilege for me and members of my delegate to be representing our country Solomon Islands at the 38th session of the General Conference of UNESCO. And an honour for me in particular to say few remarks on this wonderful occasion, in front of such esteemed dignitaries who have gathered at this conference.

Mr President, I wish to extend our Government and people of Solomon Islands greetings to you as President of the General Conference of UNESCO. I would also like to express my Government's acknowledgement with thanks to UNESCO for its continued support in our education reform programmes, particularly Early Childhood Care and Education, Basic Education Program, Teacher Professional Development and Disaster Preparedness initiatives for schools that aim to improve our systems so that they can respond to the impact of natural disasters such as cyclones.

Mr. President, Solomon Islands applauds UNESCO and other UN agencies for the vision to develop a new education agenda, 'Education 2030' which is fully captured in the Sustainable Development Goal 4, and its corresponding targets which aims to, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all". Mr President, this is a challenging aim indeed for a Small Island Developing State like Solomon Islands. The new education agenda is undoubtedly "holistic, ambitious and aspirational" and resonate well with my country's dream – to educate every citizen in our country. Nonetheless, Mr. President, Solomon Islands will strive to make a difference towards our young people' education so that they can realise their full potential and are better prepared for the challenges ahead. Education is undoubtedly the tool for change and progress and the main driver of development and in achieving the proposed Sustainable Development Goals - hence, my country's commitment to invest more in education in the coming years.

Mr. President, in this regard, I wish to inform you about the preparatory work that my Government through my Ministry of Education has made to implement the Sustainable Development Goals especially those that are concerned with further development of education in my country.

Mr President, the three broad goals of education reform programme that my country is currently implementing are, to improve:

- access to education at all levels of our education system.
- quality of education in terms of teacher effectiveness and better learning strategies for students, and
- management of resources at the national, provincial, education authority and school level.

Mr President, since Solomon Islands began a comprehensive education reform in 2004, our country has made educational advances particularly in terms of improved access to primary education although progress was slow than what we hoped. But the good news of us is that many of our school age children are now attending primary and junior secondary schools. The literacy and numeracy standards of our primary school pupils have also increased. However, we need to work hard to improve access and quality of education, not only at the Early Child Care and Education level, but also at the senior secondary education level.

Mr. President, there is now a growing emphasis on the quality of education in my country especially, to improve the quality of teaching and learning processes, so that our students can acquire essential knowledge, skills and attitudes they require to earn a living as well as to contribute towards the social and economic development of Solomon Islands.

Mr President, in order to strengthen our education reform initiatives, my ministry has progressed work more recently on the development of our new Education Sector Strategic Framework, which will take my country through to 2030, as well as developed our five year cycle medium term National Education Plans and Provincial Education Action Plans. These plans will align with the Sustainable Development Goal 4 - to guide the development of education as of next year onward.

Mr. President, although we have made moderate progress in our efforts to improve the quality of education and learning opportunities for our children and youths, Solomon Islands still need to work hard to implement programmes and activities of UNESCO's sectoral mandates such as to develop participatory approach that can enable us to integrate traditional and scientific knowledge in the management of the impact of climate change and natural hazards.

Mr. President, I want to reiterate the fact that Climate Change is the most critical threat to our very existence in the Pacific Island Countries (PIC) including Solomon Islands and require international understanding and assistance to support the PIC develop programmes that would enable us to manage the impacts of climate change. Mr. President, there is a need for the industrialised nations particular to honour their obligations and press as hard as they possibly can to reduce global temperature increase, to avoid catastrophic consequences related to climate change in our part of the world - the Pacific.

Mr. President, my country also needs to place more emphasis in the development of mechanisms and systems that will enable our citizens to preserve our cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge given the fact that Solomon Islands have diverse cultures. Finally, Mr. President, there is a need to strengthen the use of ICT as a tool for teaching and learning. The recent growth of ICT and its increasing importance in social and economic development has profound implications for education in Solomon Islands. As a Small Island Developing State concerted efforts are needed to progress the ICT programme in our school system.

In conclusion, Mr. President, Solomon Islands is grateful to be part of UNESCO's educational, scientific, and cultural programmes and is committed to implement future activities and projects within these sectoral mandates. However, Solomon Islands will need assistance from its development partners to implement the programmes mandated by UNESCO. Thank you one and all for your attention.