



National Policy Statement of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

General Policy Debate

38th Session of the General Conference of the UNESCO

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President of the General Conference

Chairman of the Executive Board

Director General

Honourable Ministers and Heads of Delegations

Delegates and Caribbean Colleagues

Specially Invited Guests

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

I bring greetings on behalf of the new Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley. I wish to congratulate His Excellency Stanley Stimataa on his assumption to the Presidency of the 38th General Conference of UNESCO and the Director-General on her leadership as she carries forward the mandate of this unique organization. I wish to also join in congratulating UNESCO on its 70th

anniversary and further welcome Montserrat on its entry into the fold as an Associate Member.

Trinidad and Tobago, like many of its Caribbean and Latin American nations, is a small developing territory faced with a number of historical concerns. In fact, its modern history is riddled with the tragedies of the genocide of its First Peoples, enslavement, indentureship and centuries of colonial domination and exploitation. Any or all of these form a more than adequate basis for continued underdevelopment. That as a nation we have managed to move beyond these historical realities is owed to the intervention of positive agencies like UNESCO but also to the prudent policies implemented by our leaders. For example, Trinidad and Tobago is now a nation that spends in excess of fifteen percent (15%) of its annual budgetary allocations on education. It has also, in keeping with the wider UNESCO mandate of lifelong learning, moved assiduously towards the provision of universal education at the Early Childhood, Primary and Secondary levels. Coupled with these moves, it has also encouraged a sharp increase in the number of citizens privy to tertiary education via the Government Assisted Tertiary Education (GATE) Programme wherein citizens pursuing tertiary education either locally or regionally enjoy the benefit of having the cost of their tuition paid by the state. The overarching philosophy guiding these policies is the idea that pupils and students in Trinidad and Tobago should benefit from a “seamless” education system from the pre-primary to the tertiary level.

Of course the mandate of UNESCO and moreover its involvement with Trinidad and Tobago extends well beyond the confines of education. This purview also countenances issues of Social and Human Sciences, Natural Sciences and Culture and as a consequence of this, it is deeply involved with other salient objectives such as youth development, entrepreneurial innovation (especially amongst young people) and the importance of promoting and preserving distinct cultural identities and heritages. On this score, the ideals of UNESCO are aligned perfectly with the ideals of the Government of my twin-island republic. It should be noted that Trinidad and Tobago remains one of the most ethnically diverse and multicultural societies in the Caribbean and as many might argue, in the world.

Since national independence in 1962, my country has adopted as national policy, the celebration and promotion of the different cultural and ethnic identities that make up the nation's population. This has helped to ensure that Trinidad and Tobago has not been plagued by the kinds of ethnic and sectoral rivalries and contentions that might otherwise have arisen given its ethnic, cultural and religious composition.

As one of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), a grouping that has been widely acknowledged by the United Nations for its high vulnerability to external shocks due to, among other things, small size, and therefore warranting special attention from the

international community to assist and support their developmental efforts. My government is committed to:

Implementing climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies to build resilience to the impacts of climate change. It should be noted in this regard, that in the Caribbean, Trinidad and Tobago pioneered with the submission to the UNFCCC in August of this year, of its Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDC's) towards stabilizing global temperature.

Promoting energy efficiency and renewable energy sources including wind and solar as the means to increase energy security and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels to power our economy; and

Integrating all interventions involving the environment and natural resources within our social, economic and land use policies taking account of the international Conventions to which we are a party.

It is critical to note however that having stated all of this that there is no intention here to say that Trinidad and Tobago is a perfect society or a utopia. We have our challenges like most or all other societies. This treatise has attempted to provide an honest assessment of a nation which, despite its impediments, remains dedicated to growth and

development, inclusiveness for all its citizens and a better standard of living for our present and future generations. These laudable objectives are achievable but they will not be realized unilaterally. The support of organisations like UNESCO, has and continues to be integral to these current and long term-objectives. Trinidad and Tobago has had a long and venerable relationship with UNESCO spanning some fifty-three (53) years and I wish to convey the assurance that the new government of my nation understands the significance and mutual benefits of this relationship; that it intends to strengthen the bonds that bind us, and that the collaboration between us will extend and grow well into the foreseeable future.

I thank you.

