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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
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Address by
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of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the launch of the Youth PATH project in St. Kitts and Nevis

St. Kitts and Nevis, 14 January 2006

Honourable Minister,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here for the launch of another YouthPATH project in the Caribbean. In the recent past, I have visited such projects in the Bahamas, Jamaica, Dominica, Barbados and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, where young people have been receiving training in the management and development of heritage tourism sites over the last four years. UNESCO has established other sites in Belize, St. Lucia and Suriname. This year, we are happy to welcome Grenada and St. Kitts and Nevis to this ever-expanding family of young tourism entrepreneurs and new custodians of the cultural and natural heritage of the Caribbean.

It is most fitting that St. Kitts and Nevis is joining this particular project given your long and rich history in the shaping of the Caribbean that we know today and in light of the diligence with which you have preserved buildings and sites dating back to the 17th century. The cities of Basseterre and Charlestown are recognized as fine examples of urban historic preservation in the Caribbean today – indeed, they stand out as a model to be emulated by all who recognize the value of their cultural heritage and wish to preserve it, in tribute to those early nation-builders and as a gift to the future generations. In this regard, I congratulate the efforts of the government and people of St. Kitts and Nevis and the members of the St. Christopher Heritage Society as well as those of the Nevis Heritage Society for their tireless efforts and for the excellent results they have achieved in preserving and conserving these historic sites.

The shining jewel in the crown of this success is, of course, the Brimstone Hill Fortress, which we were proud to inscribe on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1999. This magnificent fortification bears witness not only to the military expertise of the building's designers but also to the skilled enslaved Africans who constructed it. It thus links this event with the UNESCO Slave Route project, which examines the effects of slavery and how it impacted on the development of new societies in the Americas and on the built and natural environment. I expect that Brimstone Hill Fortress will come once again into sharp focus when UNESCO invites Member States to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 2007.

Brimstone Hill Fortress is a unique construction among the world's historic military defences. You are indeed fortunate and privileged to be the guardians of such a valued embodiment of world history. I congratulate you on the care that you, through the Brimstone Hill Fortress National Park Society, have given to its preservation. In so doing, you have indicated to the youth of your country where your values lie and have underscored the importance of history and culture in the constitution of your society.

I would like to take this opportunity to encourage you to submit candidatures of other sites that you deem worthy of World Heritage status, including those that fall within the new category of ‘cultural landscapes’ and those which, in conjunction with neighbouring countries, could form part of a serial nomination. Despite positive strides in recent years, the Caribbean is still under-represented on the World Heritage List but this situation can be rectified through joint efforts by Member States and the Secretariat.

The process of safeguarding cultural heritage offers intangible and tangible rewards. The intangible benefits come in the form of national pride, high self-esteem and self-worth, and a stronger understanding of self, place and origin.

The tangible benefits include an enhanced and distinctive tourism experience. Today, increasing numbers of leisure travelers seek to discover a history and a culture of which they have little or no previous knowledge. Today’s tourist is culturally curious and seeks adventure and new information. The development of a vibrant heritage tourism industry gives each country the possibility of putting their unique historical and cultural attributes at the service of the nation, not least through the economic benefits deriving from cultural tourism. And who is better to lead this initiative than the youth of today, the entrepreneurs and the sustainers of tomorrow’s economies?

Heritage tourism, of course, is not confined to culture’s tangible forms. Intangible cultural heritage plays a vital role in establishing the cultural identity of a nation while contributing to economic growth through cultural or creative industries closely linked with tourism. I refer here to music, dances, festivals, carnivals, masquerades, rituals, costumes, arts, crafts, traditional practices, culinary arts, stories, myths and legends, to name just a few. These practices form the backbone of a culture and render a country unique in a global context.

In this connection, I wish to single out the Masquerades of St. Kitts and Nevis which bear witness again to the cross-fertilization of cultures that occurred as a by-product of slavery and the slave trade. The Masquerades demonstrate the survival of the indomitable spirit of a people, their creativity and their ability to find mechanisms for overcoming a system that sought to dehumanize and belittle the individual. I am pleased, therefore, by the success of the UNESCO project on the “Revitalization of Traditional Masquerades Arts and Costume-Making: Developing a Tourism Product for the Caribbean”, supported by Funds-in-Trust from Italy.

Let me also mention the leading role that St. Kitts and Nevis has played in the development of the Small Island Voice programme, which addresses issues of sustainable development in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). This, too, augurs well for the forthcoming work of the YouthPATH project, which will examine issues

of island living and the contribution of young people to sustainable development through heritage and tourism. It was heartening, therefore, to know that the youth of this country were well represented at the Mauritius meeting on SIDS. We were also pleased to welcome a ‘youth ambassador’ from St. Kitts and Nevis to the Youth Forum which took place during UNESCO’s General Conference in October last year.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My foregoing remarks will help you to understand why the YouthPATH project holds my special interest. Not only does it train young people to run businesses of their own in the field of heritage tourism but it also molds them into well-rounded and well-adjusted members of society who are prepared for leadership roles and can themselves become role models to their peers regarding such important issues as HIV and AIDS eradication and drug abuse.

As a result of the YouthPATH project, I look forward to the emergence in the years ahead of a cadre of dynamic trained young people who are equipped to participate in the development of heritage tourism.

I have great pleasure in officially launching the UNESCO YouthPATH project in St. Kitts and Nevis.

Thank you.