

Statement by St. Kitts and Nevis

Minister Shawn Richard's Speech

39th Session of UNESCO General Conference.

Introduction

President of the General Conference, Her Excellency Ms. Zohour ALAOUI, Her Excellency Madame Director General, Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board, fellow Honorable Ministers, including those from my own Caribbean Sub-region, Distinguished Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen. I am honored to address this august body on behalf of the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis. My government continues to extol the virtues of UNESCO and the expertise it provides us as a Small Island Developing States. UNESCO remains an indispensable stakeholder in our quest to achieve the United Nations sustainable development goals.

SIDS

Mr. President, I believe I echo the sentiments of my Caribbean and SIDS colleagues in stressing that Small Island States like ours must be elevated to a position of global priority. I support the growing consensus that we must develop and implement more effective, timely and tailored measures that adequately reflect the specificities of SIDS, taking into account our islands' vulnerabilities linked to diseconomies of scale, external economic shocks and the increase in frequency and intensity of natural disasters. In the wake of the recent hurricanes Irma and Maria, leaving a trail of devastation and destruction across the Caribbean region, we look

to UNESCO as a major partner in our efforts to adapt and build resilience in the face of the effects of climate change.

St. Kitts and Nevis relies on UNESCO's expertise and support in protecting our education sector, by providing resilience-building strategies, strengthening our early-warning systems, and in preserving and protecting our places of memory and cultural heritage, as contributing factors to our sustainable future.

Displaced school-aged children and youth, because of the recent hurricanes in the Caribbean, find themselves deprived of structured schooling, and this has put enormous strains on the educational system, its resources, both teaching staff and physical assets, especially school buildings.

The destructive impact of climate change prompts me to urge UNESCO to apply a more disaggregated level of data for development indicators, and a re-classification of the GDP criteria relating to small island developing states.

Critically, we urgently need to address this misplaced per capita criteria used for funding, in working more closely with the World Bank who has initiated a SIDS project aimed at defining vulnerability and resilience factors.

Youth and Social Development

Madame President, We firmly believe that the solutions to the problems among the youth on our islands lie inherently within, and through, the young people themselves. We must create the opportunity for youth to play an integral role in promoting and embracing the humanities – especially through sporting activities - as a tool for personal development and empowerment, health and well-being, physical education, whilst embracing Anti-Doping practices. Sport is a powerful tool for youth-enhancing development and vital – as a preventative measure - in our strategy to combat crime and anti-social behavior. Youth must access to, and actively participate in, life-long quality education, encapsulating some understanding of their history and cultural heritage legacy, but equally, skills, such as vocational training. These are the solid basis for building a sustainable and inclusive Caribbean Society.

Conclusion

Distinguished President, members, colleagues, the 21st century has presented us with unprecedented, political, economic, environmental, and social challenges.

As a small island state St. Kitts and Nevis seeks to manoeuvre through these challenges, we look to UNESCO's expertise and competencies, in bringing peace to war-torn societies, eradicating poverty in our societies and addressing resilience factors associated with climate change. We urge for more focused work activities

on climate change adaptation and mitigation policies, youth integration and education and training policy development. UNESCO can play a pivotal role in these areas at SIDS level and really make a difference.

Madame President, as we evolve towards new leadership at UNESCO, my Government wishes to put on record our sincere gratitude to Her Excellency Irene Bokova, for her sterling contribution as Director General of this fine Organisation.

Her determined efforts to bring about reform within the Organization, specifically in a particularly challenging budget environment were commendable.

The St. Kitts & Nevis Delegation can attest to the untiring and balanced efforts of Mrs. Bokova's steadfast leadership in raising the awareness of multiple challenges facing small island developing states. We would also like to congratulate and welcome the new Director-General, Her Excellency Ms. Audrey AZOULAY, and wish her well in her endeavors to further make UNESCO fit for purpose.

Thank you for your kind attention.