

39th session of UNESCO's General Conference

**Speech of the Honorable St. Clair Prince
Minister of Education, National Reconciliation and Ecclesiastical Affairs
of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines**

Saturday 4 November 2017

President of the 39th session of the General Conference
President of the Executive Board
Madame Director General
Excellencies
Esteemed Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

Mme. President,

Allow me to congratulate you upon your election as President of the 39th session of the General Conference and wish you every success during your presidency.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines welcomes New Caledonia, a sister island, as an Associate member of UNESCO.

The world has changed and all countries are grappling with new problems – population explosion, environmental and climatic disasters, inequality, terrorism....They are global challenges which we, the Member states, can only address by moving forward together within a real spirit of cooperation. **International cooperation is at the heart of UNESCO's mandate** and it is our responsibility to give the keys to the Secretariat to enable them to unlock solutions and to simplify our methods of work for increased efficiency and more impact on the ground.

The **UN System is united around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Agenda and it is also our responsibility** to go forward resolutely in this direction and to work together to eradicate poverty, to ensure quality education, to adapt to and mitigate climate change, to foster research and to facilitate connectivity through communication and information tools.

On behalf of the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, I would like to reiterate the importance that my country accords to its partnership with UNESCO. Indeed, our national agenda recognizes the effect of climate change, the inclusiveness of education in all its diverse forms, and **Small Island Developing States (SIDS) as a priority.**

The recent disasters in our sister Caribbean islands and the debilitating effects caused by Hurricanes Irma, Maria and José remind us of the vulnerabilities of SIDS and the need for a binding global response to climate change. **We therefore look forward to strong and assertive action to address issues of climate change and disaster risk reduction and a strong commitment to supporting the sustainability of SIDS.**

Indeed, within this context, St. Vincent and the Grenadines thanks the Secretariat and the member states for issuing a **draft declaration on ethical principles in relation to climate change.** We are looking forward to its adoption at this General Conference. However, we note that this declaration has taken 10 years of reflection to come to fruition – unfortunately we do not have another 10 years to act upon it. Climate change with its related ethical issues is affecting us all now.

As Island States, the role of the Oceans is of strategic importance to us. An integrated management approach of our Oceans, and a **strengthened global ocean governance framework,** are prerequisites for the sustainable use of these valuable resources.

Building on this, the continued support from the International Oceanographic Commission (IOC) for the implementation of **Early Warning Systems for Tsunamis and other marine hazards,** is of great importance to vulnerable small islands like St Vincent and the Grenadines. The completion of this programme could mean the difference between our survival and significant loss of life. We therefore urge greater focus on the mobilization of the necessary funds to complete this important programme.

Mme President, the extreme vulnerability and low resilience of Small Island Developing States are recognised by UNESCO – in fact, the **SIDS Action Plan** outlines many of the steps to build resilience capacity. UNESCO is well placed through its high-level expertise, capacity-building, policy advice and mutual cooperation to implement the plan. We look to UNESCO to re-double its effort to identify and allocate much needed resources.

St .Vincent and the Grenadines welcomes UNESCOs continued support in our efforts to achieve the SDGs. We see education as the main vehicle for economic and social change, to fight poverty, and address issues of violence and extremism. It is our strong

belief that “No child should be left behind”, and we are determined to provide meaningful education and training opportunities for all our people. **The Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines has already crafted and designed policies to ensure equal access to quality education, on information technology, immediate remedial programmes for slow learners and, with the assistance of UNESCO, on the provision of opportunities for technical and vocational training and life-long learning.**

Mme President, **Culture** has always been an important part of our development agenda. We believe that this is best achieved through the implementation of the cultural conventions. SVG continues to benefit tremendously from the work done through these conventions notably, Cultural Diversity, Intangible Cultural Heritage and the World Heritage Conventions. We urge continued support.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is today a candidate to the Executive Board. If elected, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reiterates its commitment to continue to defend the mandate of UNESCO and to work closely with our neighbours and friends in the Latin America and Caribbean Region and with all member states for the benefit of all and in the best interests of the Organization.

In conclusion, Mme President, **inequality in the world is not new but is becoming ever more significant - between regions, between countries and within every country.** We therefore place great importance on the efforts made in the United Nations to review the indicators related to poverty levels and to revise the situation of the so-called middle income countries

In this regard, we call on UNESCO to take into consideration the real needs of countries. **Capacity building is crucial to build skills and competencies for future generations.** Youth count on UNESCO and UNESCO should count on Youth. We hope that the new Director General will give young people the priority they deserve – they are our hope for the future and for a better world.

Thank you for your attention.