

56. **The President:**

Thank you very much Your Excellency. Now I welcome Her Excellency, Ms Patricia Lourens-Philips, Minister for Education, Youth, Culture and Sports of Sint Maarten. Please, the floor is yours.

57.1 **Ms Lourens-Philips (Sint Maarten):**

Madam President, Madam Director-General, Your Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, Mr President, as the new Minister for Education, Youth, Culture and Sports of Sint Maarten, it is an honour and pleasure for me to participate in this illustrious event. Let me take a few seconds to extend on behalf of Sint Maarten congratulations to the people of Anguilla on achieving associate membership of UNESCO. Anguilla is one of Sint Maarten's neighbouring islands, less than 30 minutes away by boat. Our people share many common aspects of culture, economic and social activity.

57.2 Madam President, Sint Maarten became a country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands in October 2010, and a year later we became an Associate Member of UNESCO. Since then we have made important strides in many areas and I would like to share with you our major achievements. The legal framework for the installation of Sint Maarten's National Commission for UNESCO has been approved by the Government, the Secretariat is functional and a Secretary-General for UNESCO has been appointed.

57.3 In the domain of culture on Sint Maarten, where the preservation and highlighting of our national heritage is concerned, historically 1 July is known as our Day of Emancipation. This day was proclaimed as a public holiday for the first time in 2012 to afford our people the opportunity to reflect on the atrocities of slavery and celebrate our freedom from its shackles. Also in 2012 and 2013 the Governor of Sint Maarten hosted two symposia with the themes "National Heritage: its historical, cultural and economic importance" and "Sustainable Development: challenges for Sint Maarten as a small island Caribbean nation" respectively. These symposia brought together a large cross-section of the community of our island as well as professionals from neighbouring islands. By ministerial decree at the beginning of this year, the decade started in 2013 and ending in 2023 was proclaimed: "The Decade of Revitalizing Our Natural and Cultural Heritage".

57.4 Madam President, against this backdrop Sint Maarten is in the process of acceding to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. In addition, we support and endorse the project proposal on strengthening capacities to implement the 2003 Convention in Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius and Saba, in cooperation with the Netherlands and Suriname, which will be realized in 2014. The cultural institutional infrastructure of Sint Maarten was further advanced by the establishment of the foundation called "PitchIT Caribbean". PitchIT Caribbean proposes to collaborate with other Member States in the Caribbean and to serve as the portal for the tangible cultural heritage project called "The Eastern Caribbean Coastal Fortifications and Related Cultural Landscapes". In this context, I call attention to one of our new objectives, which is to obtain recognition for a category 2 centre on Sint Maarten. Our proposal for this centre is to serve as a world-renowned professional institute in the area of tangible cultural heritage supported by information technology.

57.5 Culture and education meet where the focus on the youth of Sint Maarten begins. Madam President, representing the multicultural composition of our society, our young people came together in a youth round table conference in September of this year. The preliminary report of the youth round table conference cited identity as an area of importance to our young people. As a result, Sint Maarten's 2013 programme in commemoration of International Children's Rights Day will focus on identity under the theme "My right to an identity: my right to belong." Our youth parliament engages in annual sessions at the parliament of Sint Maarten's headquarters.

57.6 As far as science is concerned, Madam President, a Man and the Biosphere (MAB) committee has been established on Sint Maarten. A potential site has been selected as a biosphere reserve and presently the committee is engaging in the process to request the designation of the selected site as a UNESCO reserve.

57.7 In the area of education, Madam President, I am proud to announce that Sint Maarten now has its own national institute for technical and vocational education. Our Government is committed to providing the students of this institute for continuing and tertiary education with appropriate knowledge, skills and competencies to enable them to either successfully enter the job market or to actively pursue an opportunity for self-employment. Mr President, I am equally proud to announce yet another project to you, which is the "one laptop per child" project. The ambitious goals of this project are to provide a tablet to each student, to equip our schools with the necessary infrastructure and provide our teachers with the necessary training to make our education system relevant to the technological requirements of the twenty-first century.

57.8 In order to provide optimal development opportunities for our students with special needs, we engaged the assistance of a United States university to categorize the special needs of our students and to make recommendations for individual remediation plans. In closing Mr President, it is our aim as a new Associate Member of this august body, to continue building on what we have embarked upon and developing new initiatives in the area of education, science, and culture in our continued efforts to uphold the ideals and goals of UNESCO. In light of this we would like to take this opportunity to announce our full support and sponsorship of the draft resolution to reinforce UNESCO's strategy in small island developing States (SIDS) as part of the post-2015 development agenda. I thank you for your attention.