

Madame Chair, Excellency's, Distinguished Representatives, our Youth Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen.... I bid you warm greetings from the Cook Islands.

When I addressed the General Policy debate at the 38th session of General Conference in 2015, UNESCO and the Cook Islands were both celebrating anniversaries. We reflected on milestones and achievements, set new goals, and explored opportunities for the future.

And so where are we now? Have we found our place in the new global agenda? Do we have mechanisms in place, to ensure that UNESCO is contributing effectively and efficiently to the global outcomes? Are we, as member states, supporting the work and mission of UNESCO in our own policy priorities, to ensure that the SDGs truly are a globally achieved agenda?

Our own reflections in preparation for this meeting, again raised the questions for us of how can the Cook Islands better contribute to the UNESCO agenda, and how can the programmes and initiatives of UNESCO support our own development pathway?

I am pleased to confirm that the Cook Islands honoured the commitment it made at the last General Conference. We have ratified the Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. We have also re-established our Te Reo Maori Language Commission, to ensure both the protection and currency of our language, and established the Cultural and Historical Places Board of Trustees, to support the protection and maintenance of valued places in our community, and ensure their stories are captured for the next generation.

We highly value our traditional knowledge in any form, process or practice. This traditional

knowledge, is part of our DNA, it is in our genes and therefore, particularly in the areas of conservation, drives our approach to the 21st century. You may recall my reference earlier in the week to the establishment of Marae Moana – our Cook Islands Marine Park – dedicating our entire exclusive economic zone of almost 2 million square kilometers to sustainable development. Traditional knowledge and management practice, is a fundamental concept of Marae Moana.

We are also committed to the protection of our environment through the conversion of our energy source to renewable energy. Back in 2010, we made a very strong policy commitment to convert 50% of our energy source to renewables by 2015, and 100% by 2020. Ladies and Gentlemen, Excellencies, we achieved our 50% target on time, in 2015. And we are on target to achieve our 100% target of a 100% conversion by 2020. Interestingly, we started this work with our most isolated and

fragile islands, to ensure their energy independence – even more important when we consider the difficulties of transport, and other services to remote communities, especially in times of high risk, due to tropical storms and cyclones.

The Cook Islands, as a member of the Pacific Education Small Working Group, has been engaged with the development of a new Regional Education Framework, that will support the Pacific as a whole, in working towards SDG 4. My Government has made a commitment of over 4% of GDP to Education; that commitment has been realised, and it is my intention to continue this commitment. We are particularly focussed on developing responses to Goal 4.7, and supporting the development of life skills in our young people.

We know that the issue of supporting our Youth in a fast changing 21st century, is one that the whole Pacific, and I sure many of you, are

dealing with. On this note, I am encouraged by the strong voice of youth we heard on Monday, and their request to be seen as true partners, and not only as recipients or beneficiaries, in the global discussion.

Within the Pacific region, we know each other well. We were all delighted on Monday, at the inclusion of New Caledonia into UNESCO as an associate member. We continue to work together for the betterment of our region, whilst respecting the sovereignty and unique culture and contribution, of our individual countries and people.

To this end, the Cook Islands is humbled to have the unanimous support of all Pacific Islands countries and territories in our candidacy for the Executive Board of UNESCO.

As Pacific Islanders, we often talk about our concept of family and what it means to be part of the family. The Cook Islands stands ready to

work with all members of the UNESCO family, to ensure our world will provide a safe, nurturing, understanding, peaceful and affirmative place for the next generation and beyond.

This is the commitment of the Cook Islands.

Kia orana e kia manuia