



**National Statement
of the
Government of the Kingdom of Tonga**

Delivered at the General Policy Debate
on the occasion of the 39th Session of the
General Conference of UNESCO

By

Mr. Claude Tupou, Head of Tonga's Delegation
& Chief Executive Officer for Education and Training
Ministry of Education and Training
Nuku'alofa, Kingdom of Tonga

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1. Introductory Address:

- May I start by registering the sincere apology from Tonga's Minister of Education, Honorable Penisimani Fifita, at this UNESCO's 39th General Conference
- Her Excellency Ms. Zohour Alaoui, I congratulate you on your appointment to the Presidency of this UNESCO 39th General Conference.
- Chair of the Executive Board and Madame Director General, Mrs. Irina Bokova, I commend you both for your efforts and unrelenting leadership in steering the reforms and UNESCO's goals for development, peace and shared prosperity for its member states, and
- Distinguished Delegates

2. Remarks:

- It is an honor for me to address this 39th General Conference of UNESCO.
- As member states, we all hail from different parts of this globe, which mean that depending on location, size, culture and level of development, we will view our individual state transformation and progress through different lenses.
- However, no matter where we live, we all share the

same basic needs as a human nation and I believe that this is where the existence of a collective organization such as UNESCO, with its goals and mandates become an essential tool, not only for the development and progress of each of its member states, but for some of us, survival.

- Generally, Tonga aligns itself with UNESCO's Goals and in particular with regard to cultural heritage, education, environment and science.
- In terms of cultural heritage, Tonga looks forward to UNESCO's support in protecting and preserving its cultural heritage and sites.
- In terms of Education and Science, Tonga supports the Education for the 21st Century theme and fully supports the Global Education 2030 Agenda through SDG4.
- Having highlighted the fact that our states are different and therefore the advantages and disadvantages we face, Tonga is of the view that, it is inevitable and only fitting that implementation of the SDGs are tailored to suit the circumstances and level of each particular member state.
- One example I can point to where my country may differ from other member states is gender equality in education. Statics will show that:

- **At the Universal Basic Education Enrollment - 51% Males, 49% Females**
- **At the Post Universal Basic Education Enrollment - 49% Males, 51% Females**
- **For degree and diploma holders - 49% Males, 51 Females**

- Accordingly, in terms of a course of action for Tonga in education, the need is one of availability of opportunities for education rather than gender equality
- As for the environment, we are in agreement that climate change is the defining challenge for all of us. To a larger degree, it is felt more by our Small Island Developing States or as often identified in this forum as the Large Ocean States as opposed to Larger Developed member States.
- Tonga has not been free from challenges in its implementation of some of the UNESCO programs and it is proposed that a way of unpacking these challenges could potentially be met by ensuring that they are appropriate and fitting to each state.
- In order for the principles and mandates of this collective organization to be relevant and focused, it needs to address the specifics of each member state at its individual and unique level, be it cultural heritage, education or environment.

3. Conclusion:

- On behalf of the Government of Tonga, I reaffirm the significance that Tonga beholds for its partnership with UNESCO and its commitment to working together to bring about a sustainable future for all.