

**Transcript of the address at the Hangzhou International Congress, as delivered  
Sidney Bartley, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Youth and Culture for Jamaica  
Panel Discussion 2C: How does culture enable environmental sustainability?  
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I am one of those persons we do not believe we should we should be discussers of culture and not experiencers of culture in this UNESCO Congress, in which we see culture only underwater. And so here it goes, let's be experiencers of culture [Singing Bob Marley's songs]. A lot of what we suffer in our modern concept today is what can be easily described as mental slavery. We have enslaved our minds to certain concepts of living, to certain concepts of how we do things. And in so doing, we have separated ourselves many times from the cultural philosophies that we used to live by, and that perhaps used to make us better. When our ancestors were taken from Africa, and brought to the Caribbean, that emergence in the Caribbean was very important to what we now call Jamaican or Caribbean culture. Let us never forget that culture is a creation by men, we create culture over time as a part of our experience of life. So when the Africans were taken from Africa and placed in Jamaica or in the Caribbean on a plantation to be enslaved, and to be colonized, in our case in Jamaica, by the Spanish and the British. When indentured servants were taken from India and China, and brought to Jamaica to live and work on the same plantations. At the end of the day, because of that juxtaposition within historical significance, we created something called Caribbean culture, which is probably a "pot-pourri" of African, European, Chinese, Indian, and Middle-Eastern coming together in one small space, and yet being able to live in a fair degree of harmony. That is what it is to be Caribbean culture perhaps. We must never forget that in the creation of culture, that what man does is that culture is not created in a vacuum, that culture is created as man's response to his environment. To the large extent, it was man's response to his natural environment. If you lived in Hawaii, or versus if you found yourself in Alaska, in Jamaica we have one word for snow, and in Alaska they probably have a thousand words for snow. And the word for 'snow' in Jamaica has no bearing for us, because we don't even know what it is. So it's something we concocted and took from the Oxford or Webster dictionary, because Caribbean people like to travel and we found ourselves in New York or London, or in all kind of places where snow falls. In the Caribbean, when rain starts to fall, last night it was starting to rain, it was quite traumatic, in the beautiful experience. One of the first thing the Caribbean people wanted to do is to go home, because once it begins to rain, the Caribbean we begin to lock ourselves away, to other people it would be nothing. I say this to understand that our culture, which is a totality of our way of life constructed over time, has been constructed as a response to an environment, whether that environment is our natural environment, or whether that environment is a concocted or created environment, as in the horrible concoction that was called slavery. There were all environments that we had to live with. And so man comes in contact with the environment. There is poem called "Barbados road: call him to the sea". And it says: "Like all men who live on small islands, I must always be remembering the sea". Everywhere we turn there is the sea. We live on small islands of two hundred thousand people, living on these little islands whether you are in the Pacific or the Caribbean, or also in Africa, in the Indian Ocean or wherever. Once you live on a small island, you know a part of your culture is to respond to the sea. Whether the sea comes as a glamorous thing in white sands called a beach, or the sea comes in a tumultuous rage as it does in hurricanes, and seek to unravel and destroy all that is in its path. In the Caribbean, we developed a culture of resistance, a culture of resistance and resilience to the sea and the different elements of nature. We understood how important it is, how important it was always

for us to learn how to live in certain parts of the Caribbean, to learn what side of the country you build your house on, to teach your children what it is to survive in this conundrum called life. As that grew over years, other things began to interfere, it is called modernization; but modernization is not a problem in itself. One of the major challenges is a challenge of economics, especially trade. When trade and economics takes center stage, human vulnerability takes fond space. The vulnerability of human kind is what allows us not to live properly with our environment. Economics has created a situation that allows us to understand something that is called “Big man versus little man”, “Big woman versus little woman”. Culture never had that; in culture the little man has the opportunity to be a big man, because in most instances of cultural creation, culture is created by the ordinary grassroots people who live for the soil and who understand themselves in a particular way. Culture was never created in universities, neither was it created in any metropolis of this world. In fact the people of the metropolis, whether it is London, Paris, Milan, or Washington went to the places where culture created to take that culture, to bring it back to them, to take it on to themselves, and to create empowerment for themselves, while the real owners of culture continue to live in poverty. That poverty, that impoverishment creates cultural vulnerabilities, which doesn't allow us to live well with our environment. All of a sudden in Haiti, a country that has been very strong in traditional culture will cut down trees to make coal to eat up food. After a while, it leads to deforestation, not because they didn't know better, but because economic demands have made vulnerabilities of all of us. In that vulnerability, we act not in accordance with our environment, but in a counter point way with our environment, and the environment becomes a point-counter point to human existence. Finally, in that impoverishment, we understand that the only way forward is to return culture to the center of human existence, because economics has never helped us. In other words, trade allowed us sometimes in the past to trade each other. Because trade has no moral, trade only sees its value in the outcome of trade, which is to make a rich man of the major traders. In the trade system where human beings became property to other human beings, the environment suffers. Let us remember that when we speak of the environment in this discussion, we must not speak of the environment only as the natural environment, we must also talk about the built environment that we create: the skyscrapers, the cement blocks, the things that we call apartment buildings that we give our people to live in, people who are used to live in and seeing greenery, who are now living in high rise buildings, 8 thousand people in one place called a condominium. And in that situation, how do you raise a child for them to understand their cultural identity and their cultural integrity. In the modern dispensation, the one way forward in this environment and culture relationship, that will return culture and environment to be two things. It is for us to create the following: 1. a new form of education that is founded on cultural platforms. No child should be educated anywhere that is not educated within the culture of their ancestry, and that I mean it at the widest elements of ancestry. No child, no education should be held that does not link economics with cultural planning and cultural understanding. I understand what UNESCO has done, by having us divided in different sections, so in another room somebody is dealing social cohesion, in another room somebody is dealing with poverty alleviation. But it is wrong; it is an artificial separation that is a part of the problem of culture because culture pervades all area. I cannot discuss culture and nature, without discussing poverty alleviation because as long that there is poverty, there will cultural vulnerabilities, and as long that there are cultural vulnerabilities, we will harm the environment, and when we harm the environment we destroy humanity. We need to bring it all back together. UNESCO needs to ensure that when WIPO meets on cultural property, that culture is there, that when the World Trade Organisation meets, that culture is in the middle, that when UNCTAD meet and talk about trade and

development, and they do not talk only about the creative economy, and look only at business of culture, important as it is, because the business of culture allows us to remove some of the vulnerabilities and achieve some area of economic freedom and economic well. But we must understand that the conversation must also return to cultural integrity and identity, to the kind of cultural base that allows us to sing our own song, wherever we are. [Singing a song] The land has become strange because the culture has been removed from the center of human life.

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