



St. Christopher (St. Kitts) and Nevis

Minister Shawn Richards' Speech at the 40th Session of the UNESCO General Conference.

Salutation

President of the General Conference, His Excellency, **Mr Ahmet Altay Cengizer**, Madam Director General, **Ms. Audrey Azoulay**, Chairman of the Executive Board, fellow Honorable Ministers, including those from my own Caribbean region, Distinguished Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am deeply honored to address this session of the General Conference on behalf of the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis. My government continues to extol its unwavering support for UNESCO in contributing its valuable expertise to a Small Island Developing State, like St. Kitts & Nevis. UNESCO remains an indisputable partner in our quest to achieve the UN sustainable development goals.

SIDS

Mr. President, allow me to reiterate my government's sentiments that the UN-recognized small island states (SIDS) should be elevated to a position of global priority within the UNESCO work programme, and concomitant financial resources be allocated accordingly.

This needs to be done with some expediency. We need little reminding of the multiple vulnerabilities facing SIDS, most forcefully brought home to us recently when the Dorian Hurricane ripped through our neighbouring state, the Bahamas, leaving destruction in its wake.

Whilst supporting UNESCO's SIDS Action Plan, a reconfigured and more targeted approach should be pursued going forward in identifying SIDS activity priorities. Given the lack of resources to fully optimize existing levels of activities in the current Action Plan – despite the laudable efforts of the Secretariat – I urge that attention be given to reducing the complexity of the scope of the Action Plan, to more adequately reflect the unique specificities of SIDS structural vulnerabilities. These vulnerabilities include susceptibility to regularly occurring and more intensified natural disasters resulting from environmental degradation and climate change, limited economies of scale, geographical remoteness as well limitations on natural, human and technical resource bases and attendant high indebtedness.

One critical area in need to heightened UNESCO SIDS policy development is climate change mitigation and adaptation solutions. But we suffer from

inadequate data collection tools for assessment of impacts, identifying key vulnerabilities on the ground, and risk management/reduction mechanisms, with timely assessments by UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission/Tsunami Warning System. More emphasis should be given to funding data collection tools, and concomitant training sessions, to enable SIDS to make informed decisions about which climate change measures are appropriate.

In short, we look to UNESCO as a major partner in our efforts to adapt and build resilience to the disastrous effects of climate change.

Education policy

In the education policy area, my government remains grateful for UNESCO's penetrating review of St. Kitts & Nevis' education strategy and structures back in 2017. Central to our priorities arising from this review is the ongoing building of a framework for professionalizing teaching staff, with UNESCO input.

We now seek the world-leading expertise of UNESCO in addressing the other factors that undermine high-quality teaching and learning including:

- an outdated national curriculum and assessment framework
- insufficient policies on quality and safety standards for education and training institutions

Our second priority is young men's access to, and active participation in, life-long quality education. My government is fully cognizant that social development cannot occur as long as young people are marginalized, ostracized or disregarded. Education plays a vital role in social and youth development. But it must proceed hand-in-hand with developing an education strategy fit for the 21st Century that links higher and continuing education with labour market needs.

Water policy

My government welcomes the heightened importance provided by UNESCO in deploying its unique multi-disciplinary expertise – in science, culture, climate change, education, biodiversity resource preservation, knowledge management and information for decision-making – in addressing the multiplicity of challenges facing SIDS.

One area stands out of particular timely importance – UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme (IHP) - which is actively providing St. Kitts & Nevis with policy advice and tools to address our challenges in developing a sustainable water strategy.

Small island vulnerability factors are directly affected by limited freshwater - both ground and surface water – resources, due to rising sea levels, climate variability and change. Given that SIDS are encircled by marine water, saltwater intrusion into groundwater resources has become a problem of some magnitude.

I commend UNESCO-IHP for organizing last October in St. Kitts & Nevis a High-level Ministerial symposium on “Water for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean SIDS: Achieving water security”.

We urge UNESCO-IHP, as the only intergovernmental programme of the United Nations (UN) system devoted to water research, water resources management, and education and capacity-building to accompany us in the Caribbean to develop sustainable water capacity policies and to support us in strengthening our scientific, technical and policy capacities to manage human health and environmental risks caused by emerging pollutants in water and waste-water by improving water quality and waste-water management and promoting safe reuse of waste-water, ultimately contributing to enhance water and food security.

Conclusion

Distinguished President, members, colleagues, we face multi-dimensional challenges across the world, from global warming to massive displacement of communities fleeing wars, famine and social upheaval, from soaring inequality to hugely damaging financial shocks.

Amidst this we see the gradual disengagement of major powers from regional and multilateral institutions, accompanied by general demise of the multilateral consensus-building framework. These were the very foundations on which the UN was constructed in 1945.

We take solace that, in spite of these uncertainties, Member States like ours have come to rely more than ever UNESCO's comparative advantage, and competencies, in fostering peace to war-torn societies and in eradicating poverty in our societies. Our vulnerable small islands appreciate UNESCO's efforts in strengthening our capacity to address challenges of climate change, access to education and protection of our cultural heritage.

Mr. President, as we enter the third year of UNESCO's new leadership, my Government wishes to express its gratitude to Her Excellency Ms. **Audrey AZOULAY**, for her assertive support for small islands and our collective desire to see a more manageable and focused SIDS Action Plan fit for purpose.

Thank you for your kind attention.

For more details:

Dr. David P. Doyle, Ambassador of St. Kitts and Nevis to UNESCO

dl.st-kitts-and-nevis@unesco-delegations.org