

UNESCO General Conference 2019

Message from the Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, the Honorable Wycliffe Smith

Honorable President of the General Conference, the Honorable Director General, Your Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen, our sincere greetings from the friendly Island of Sint Maarten.

Mister President, it is an honor, as Minister Plenipotentiary of Sint Maarten that I stand here on behalf of the Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, at the 40th session of the UNESCO General Conference to share the progress of Sint Maarten on behalf of our Government and our people.

I am pleased to join the esteemed colleagues before me in congratulating you upon your election as President of this General Conference and I wish you every success during your presidency.

Ladies and gentlemen

Two months ago, we were reminded once more of our own ordeal; as we witnessed the horrific destruction of Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas. Our sympathies are with our sisters and brothers who were impacted, and our prayers are with them as they go through their recovery. At the 39th

conference, our island was reeling from the devastation caused by Hurricane Irma in September 2017. We are advancing in our recovery, thanks to the resilience of our people and the assistance of many global partners.

The hurricane seasons have been increasingly active. This is evidence of the disastrous impact of climate change. As Small Island Developing States (SIDS), we will not shrink in the face of such challenges. Adapt and mitigate is our mantra. Sint Maarten therefore is in strong support of the UNESCO SIDS Action Plan and UNESCO's initiatives aimed at promoting the importance of mitigation and adaptation, as well as building the resilience of SIDS to impact climate change.

We thank UNESCO for the support given to our island after Hurricane Irma and for the emergency funds that were made available. This has allowed the Division Public Education to purchase instructional and sport materials, as well as educational methods.

Mister President,

The Department of Culture and the Sint Maarten National Commission for UNESCO officially launched Sint Maarten's first Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) inventory. The ICH inventory was released under the awareness campaign, '**I Remember Intangible Cultural Heritage**'. There are 215 ICH elements thus far in the inventory. Some of the elements submitted by the people of St. Maarten include our S'Maatin English, the story of the Diamond Estate 26 Run/Escape, and the Ponum dance to name a few.

The ICH inventory is available online to the public. We would like to thank UNESCO, the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science in the Netherlands, and the Cluster Office for the Caribbean for your invaluable contribution towards making this a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen, Sint Maarten reaffirms its commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Several SDGs workshops are being conducted by the Department of Interior and Kingdom Affairs and the Sint Maarten National Commission for UNESCO for secondary and elementary teachers since February 2019. In collaboration with the University of St. Martin lectures have been hosted to educate the public. A creative

expression SDGs project allows secondary education students to express their knowledge of the SDGs using various art forms such as poetry, living statues, posters and dance.

With reference to SDG #4, Sint Maarten has executed several activities to achieve the goal of quality education. With the passing of our Study Financing Law in 2018, our Government reconfirmed our commitment to enhance equal access to higher education, and to those who choose to pursue vocational education at our local TVET institution.

The execution of the iSTEP (Inspiring our Students with Technology in Education Project) continues to assist with the implementation of 21st century learning. In 2018 and 2019, two successful TecXperience Conferences were organized and trainings for music and physical education teachers, and school counsellors were well received.

The UNESCO Associate Schools has expanded from one to three at both the secondary and elementary levels. A Sustainable School Waste Management program is being piloted at these schools. The program's emphasis is on the need to conserve, sustainably use, and manage our environment, ocean, and seas in accordance with the 2030 Agenda (SDGs

14 & 15). Our students have become ambassadors for recycling and protecting our environmental resources at their schools, homes, and neighborhoods.

St. Maarten supports and embraces Anti-Doping practices. **No Doping/No Drugs (ND²)** is an awareness campaign that received support and will be executed by the Department of Sports, in collaboration with our stakeholders in sport.

Mister President, as we continue to develop our country and pursue the Global Goals, Sint Maarten is being rebuilt stronger and better. Our spirit of resilience will propel us to fulfill our motto – *Sempre Pro Grediens*, which means we are “Always Progressing”. Since we are disproportionately affected by global concerns such as climate change, we join the messages of other SIDS: only by working together and granting SIDS an equal platform within global platforms such as UNESCO can we ensure the creation of a desirable future for ALL our children.

Thank you.

