

Solomon Islands Speech by the Minister of Education and Human Resources Development – Hon John Moffat Fugui

- **President of the General Conference,**
- **Chair of the Executive Board,**
- **Madam Director-General,**
- **Excellencies,**
- **Distinguished Delegates,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

It is my distinct honor to be present, today, at this **40th UNESCO General Conference.**

Mr. President, first, and foremost, allow me to register my appreciation to the **Director General of UNESCO** for the apt administration at the **UNESCO headquarter,** and throughout the **UNESCO system,** as a whole!

Today, **Mr. President,** when the world is faced with many challenges, such as: **climate change, internecine wars, interminable violence,** and **unrelenting poverty** – just to name a few, **the role of UNESCO,** as a platform for intellectual debate to **foster peace and sustainable development** through **Education, Science, Social and Human Science and Culture** remains ever critical!

Mr. President, I cannot stress enough the importance of education as part of my Ministry's portfolio. The Solomon Islands Government has made the decision to move actively in this domain that include: **literacy and numeracy and lifelong learning.** We have also made important progress in **primary and secondary education.** We also expand and progress **early childhood education** development. Concomitant to all these, we have initiated focus on **school-to-work program.**

Mr. President, **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)** is a key area where Solomon Islands needs further cooperation and development assistance. In this important area, I renew our appeal to UNESCO to get a **substantial programme** on the road in the Pacific Islands countries. We await your response on such a program. As with all areas of education, the **quality of teaching by teachers** is key to quality learning. To train teachers, we need excellent higher education institutions and, of course, **educators and academics.** At this juncture, **Mr. President,** I am pleased to report that Solomon Islands has established its first National University (**the Solomon**

Island National University – SINU) in 2012. This is progress we have made towards achieving **SDG 4, target 4.3**. As such, we are now able to accommodate a greater number of students **WHO WISH** to do tertiary training. These trained people are essential for our **Labor Market**.

In the area of **Culture, Mr. President**, we are making progress, especially in the areas of **Intangible Heritage** and **Creative Industries**.

Mr. President, Solomon Islands has ratified the **Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage** on the **11th May 2018**. This Convention has been entered into force on the **11th August 2019**. Solomon Islands is the **178th UNESCO State** to join and the **13th State** in the **Asia Pacific Region**, to do so. But, **Mr. President, Sir**, we need **further and better-focused support from UNESCO, is needed!**

Mr. President, I wish to reiterate, again, that **“climate change and particularly natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, tsunamis, and cyclones are life-threatening realities to vulnerable Small Island Developing States, in the Pacific, including my own country - Solomon Islands.”** I would like to, once again, call on **UNESCO** and our **development partners** to assist us in strengthening of **Early Warning Systems** and support for **Disaster Preparedness Programs**.

Mr. President, Solomon Islands is concerned about the **budget cuts** affecting our region. This has drastically affected the services provided by the **Field Office in Apia, Samoa**. **Mr. President**, this is the only office responsible for **UNESCO’s work** in the **seventeen (17) Pacific Islands countries** - we come from. Here, **Mr. President**, I wish to make a **strong appeal for UNESCO** to strengthen the regional office and make good on **previous promises** to be more effective on the ground.

Mr. President, although we come from small island states - in the Pacific – our peoples are burdened by some of the **largest problems in the world**. Make very sure, **Mr. President, Sir**, that your view of us is **not jaundiced** by the **continental bias and prejudice** most **non-Pacific Islanders** have suffered us for **umpteens years**. **Mr. President**, as you would well appreciate, **Pacific Islanders** are no less important than the rest of Others.

In conclusion, **Mr. President**, I wish to categorically state that, **Solomon Islands assures UNESCO of the support**, the continuation and ongoing educational programmes towards the **achievement of SDG No. 4 - quality education for all Solomon Islanders**.

Mr. President, I wish UNESCO every success - in all its work, now, and in the coming years.

THANK YOU.