

40th session of the General Conference

General Policy Debate - 15 November 2019

Statement by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

*Ms Janeil Henry-Rose
Secretary General of the National Commission to UNESCO*

Mr President of the General Conference,

Mr Chairman of the Executive Board,

Madam Director General,

Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Mr President, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines congratulates you on your election and wishes you every success.

May I take this opportunity to thank the outgoing President, Ms Zohour ALAWI and the Chair of the Executive Board, Mr Byong-hyun LEE, for their leadership and commitment during their respective tenures.

Mr President, as a new non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines reaffirms its commitment to multilateralism and diplomacy for peace to build a better world for future generations.

Mr President, the mission of UNESCO and its functions must continue in the next 41 C/4. WHAT are the tools we should develop to find solutions, to resolve inequalities, to bridge the gaps and to deliver for greater impact?

As the world continues to face economic, environmental, social, technological challenges, a holistic vision for a UNESCO towards 2030 and beyond needs to be shaped, taking into account the lessons learned and the growing needs of the countries in an interconnected world, while using the unique expertise of the Organisation in an efficient manner and ensuring a sustainable financial balance which can support the delivery of the strategic objectives set out by Member States.

Mr President, the SDGs are the collective platform to integrate the dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. This leads us to focus on related issues in the five fields of competence of UNESCO.

Our priority is education! The “Futures of Education”, launched by UNESCO, creates the opportunity to assist in leading the coordination of the implementation of SDG 4 and to reflect on education beyond 2030. As reported, the trends highlighted the need for intensifying efforts to attain these goals. Implementing SDG 4 calls for a strong political commitment. UNESCO’s support in policy advise is more pertinent than ever for establishing education public policies to building innovative, resilient and inclusive societies. Exceptional emphasis should be placed on lifelong learning by scaling up youth skills and competences, broadening the contents of education, diversifying curricula while ensuring quality education.

Our Government continues to attach great importance to technical and vocational education and training to improve employability for sustainability of our economy, as well as education to climate change and the use of ICT’s.

Mr President, climate crisis is certainly wreaking havoc on the social and economic life of Caribbean countries. These destructive impacts on SIDS demand increased attention and focus. The recently-held Caribbean Forum Advocating for SIDS was indeed timely, as it brought into sharp focus a number of already-known realities and corresponding proposals for action, in relation to the SIDS agenda. It is now patently clear that our response to the SIDS imperatives, cannot be business as usual. SIDS must be a global priority for UNESCO.

My country recognizes UNESCO's IOC work on disaster risk reduction, mitigation and adaptation, tsunami alert systems. The Declaration of SAMOA Pathway adopted at the UN General Assembly in October 2019 recommends many UN entities to integrate SIDS priorities in their respective strategic and work plans in accordance with their mandates. Regrettably, UNESCO was not included.

Nonetheless, we are sure that UNESCO will use these recommendations to update the SIDS Action Plan ultimately, making it more strategic and focused for the next two years.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is mindful of the budgetary constraints impacting the delivery of UNESCO's programmes. We expect that the work undertaken through the structured financing dialogue will reap positive results. Nevertheless, our countries still struggle to access much needed funding from the Official Development Aid because of our Middle Income Country status. We firmly recommend that the criteria that determine access to ODA based on GDP per capita be reviewed and changed.

We wish to highlight the catalytic role of the National Commissions and UNESCO's networks in delivering the programmes and that the task be given to them for establishing fundraising and partnerships to help bolster the work on the ground.

Mr President, «Nothing is permanent except change; change in life is inevitable so it can neither be avoided nor ignored». Therefore, my country reiterates its conviction that the new structures in the sectors and the new strategy should be driven by the mandate of UNESCO and the needs of Member states, taking into account the outcomes of Pillar 3 of the Strategic Transformation.

Mr President, I wish to reiterate Saint Vincent and the Grenadines' commitment to UNESCO and pledge continued support to achieving its noble mandate.