



**REMARKS**  
**BY**  
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**THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS**  
**AT THE**  
**40<sup>th</sup> GENERAL CONFERENCE OF UNESCO**  
**GENERAL POLICY DEBATE**  
**IN**  
**PARIS, FRANCE**  
**NOVEMBER 15, 2019**

**BAHAMAS**

Mr. President  
Madam Director General  
Colleague Ministers  
Representatives of the various delegations  
Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

I am honored and privileged to address this 40<sup>th</sup> General UNESCO Conference as the Minister of Education for the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

I bring greetings on behalf of both His Excellency The Honourable Cornelius A. Smith, Governor General; The Most Honourable Dr. Hubert A. Minnis, Prime Minister, and Government of The Bahamas.

Madam President, last week, The Bahamas, with support of the UNESCO Caribbean office, successfully hosted a one-day workshop, with member countries from Latin America and the Caribbean, in dialogue on establishing linkages and entry points for global citizenship education.

The collaboration was important, not because it allowed us to view and commit to adopting best practices globally, and see they may be incorporated into our own instructional agenda, but also to formulate policies and an educational framework for our curriculum.

We anticipate hosting more of those workshops, to facilitate a frank discussion on the responsibilities of global citizenship.

Madam President, Two Years ago, when I addressed this body, I informed Esteemed Delegates that The Bahamas fully supports the strategic objectives of the United Nations, particularly Sustainable Development Goal, #4.

That support has now even become more critical for The Bahamas because of the recent visit to our Country by a Most unwelcomed Guest.

In the early morning hours of Sept 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2019 – eight weeks ago, The Bahamas suffered a natural disaster of unprecedented magnitude.

Hurricane Dorian, packing sustained winds of 180mph, and gusts reaching 250mph, with sea surges reaching 27ft, decimated two of our most populated islands, Grand Bahama and Abaco, and wrecking at the same time, the 2<sup>nd</sup> and Third economic center of our country.

As a consequence, 70k of our Bahamian citizens and residents, approximately 20% of our population, were displaced, many left homeless, and yet hundreds missing and presumed dead.

Hurricane Dorian inflicted a major negative handprint on our country.

In the education sector, of which I am responsible, 10k students, and over 1000 Teachers, Administrators and Support Staff were affected, and had to be relocated and re-assigned to schools in the capital and other islands.

Additionally, Dorian damaged or destroyed dozens of educational buildings, facilities and property, including 20 Public schools in Grand Bahama, and 14 Public, 8 Private, In Abaco.

While we were able to reopen most of our Grand Bahama schools, after several weeks of closure, the majority of schools in Abaco still remain closed.

Students from the affected islands were relocated and transferred throughout the remaining educational districts in the Bahamas, with most be accommodated in Nassau, the capital.

The Bahamas appreciates the prominence UNESCO gives to climate change and Its efforts to mitigate the negative effects of increasingly stronger storms, that wreak devastatingly impacts on small island states such as The Bahamas.

Small Island Developing States while making a negligible effect on the spectre of climate change, nevertheless, suffers a vastly disproportionate casualty as a result thereof.

Hurricane Dorian impressed upon my Ministry the urgent need to address challenges which are peculiar to The Bahamas - a country of scattered islands.

As a consequence of Dorian, the graphic peculiarities and opportunities of our archipalegic nation were clearly exposed.

For instance, with a student population – both public and private – of 75, 000 students stretching over 20 populated islands and 14 school districts, and with perennial Teacher shortages, especially in vital STEM subjects, the Bahamas was compelled to accelerate its already implemented 3-yr, \$17m, digitization initiative, which started in September, 2018.

One of the dominant benefits of digitization was distance learning, to provide for the teacher gap in one instance, but also to ensure equal access to quality education for all Bahamian citizens in the next.

Because of the displacement of the thousands of students because of Dorian, we had to mobilize a virtual school, which currently provides a distance learning instruction to some 12 districts and more than 300 students, with many more being added each week, as broad band connectivity becomes available.

Madam President, our \$17 million technology upgrade was to create a smart educational system – with wireless internet connectivity throughout our one hundred and seventy two schools **(172)** and sixty **(60)** education offices, and establish the foundation for tech-smart campuses and Offices throughout the country.

So Now, because of the immediately expanded distance learning, students in our hurricane impacted, and sparsely-populated islands, can attend classes in their local

communities, instructed in real time by dedicated specialists, rather than having to be uprooted and relocated to other islands.

I am happy to report to this august assembly that the virtual school is a major successes, especially utilizing the opportunity to access an archive of recorded lessons, which are reinforcing what they were taught in the classroom.

In addition to meeting the educational needs of students who would have been displaced because of a natural disaster, the virtual school guarantees amazing benefits for our students, such as helping to increase our graduation, giving redemption to students who failed national exams, or failed to meet other graduation criteria; facilitate an Emotionally and Physically Safe Learning Environment; Personalized Learning; create a sense of independence; or even allow for the flexible Scheduling of instructions.

Madam President, The Bahamas is committed to ensuring that when our students leave high school, They are equipped with multiple literacies that will enable them to make meaningful contributions as nation builders who are globally competitive.

After a comprehensive assessment of our education sector, we were led to laser-focus on reforming our curriculum, expand access to pre-primary education and enhancing ongoing teacher training.

Additionally, in an effort to raise student achievement in literacy, renewed attention has also been given to the timetabling of Reading; so that it occupies the first 90 minutes of each day, for our elementary level students.

We are adamant that we achieve the Sustainable Development Goal which ensures that all girls and boys have access to quality early education development, care and pre-primary education by 2030. To this end, in September 2018, the Universal Pre-Primary Education initiative was launched with a mandate to increase the number of children who are enrolled in preschool.

To date the number of students in government preschools has increased significantly through the conversion of vacant classrooms, and partnership with approved privately owned preschools to accept students who cannot be accommodated in the government preschool sector. We believe this will help us to achieve not only equitable, but also inclusive education for all, thus fulfilling another major sustainable development goal.

Madam President, The Bahamas wish to pledge its support and commitment to the ideals and work of UNESCO. Please be assured of our continual collaboration.

Thank you.