



GOVERNMENT OF TUVALU

**40th SESSION OF THE UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE
GENERAL POLICY DEBATE**

Presented by:

HONOURABLE TIMI MELEI

MINISTER OF EDUCATION, YOUTH & SPORTS;

AND

CHAIRMAN, TUVALU NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR UNESCO

15th NOVEMBER 2019

UNESCO HEADQUARTER, PARIS.

Mr. President

Madame Director General

Heads of Delegations to this 40th Session of the UNESCO General Conference.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen.

Talofa and Warm Greetings from Tuvalu, the smallest independent island nation in the world.

First of all, please allow me to congratulate you, Mr. President, for your election as President of the 40th session of the General Conference. I assure you, that Tuvalu will offer its full support to you, whenever necessary, during your presidency. And I do humbly ask that your regime considers small islands states, such as Tuvalu, in your plans and decisions making, with equality, fairness and integrity.

Mr. President, Tuvalu, like every other developing country, greatly benefits from its partnership with UNESCO, especially in the areas of education and culture.

Earlier this year, Tuvalu conducted its first ever baseline study on Child Protection, which has been used to form the basis of the Tuvalu Child Welfare Protection Act, in which we hope to pass it into a law, in 2020. This Act is based on prevention and intervention approaches that capitalize on our strong community and cultural ties. With the support from UNESCO and other partners, Tuvalu is making great strides in providing children with a safer environment in schools and homes.

Quality education is our priority. This means that producing quality teachers is paramount in our Education Sector Plan. Improving literacy and numeracy is also on the top, of our priority list.

It is also important to note that Tuvalu had shifted its focus to Early Childhood Education, and Early Childhood Development. We realized that investment in Early Childhood Development and Education will bear more economic and social benefits to our country, in the long term.

Mr. President, in May this year, the UN Secretary-General visited Tuvalu. He primarily witnessed the physical impacts of climate change to the environment and people of Tuvalu. He saw with his own eyes the vulnerability of Tuvalu to climate change, and therefore he was made to believe that "Tuvalu is on the frontline of the war on climate change because climate change is striking in Tuvalu in a more dramatic way than anywhere else in the world".

Mr. President, two months after UN Secretary-General's visit, Tuvalu hosted the 50th Pacific Islands Leaders Forum. It was perhaps one of the biggest high-level meeting to be held in our two-point-four (2.4) square kilometers capital island. Again, climate change was the top topic that Pacific leaders discussed with passion and heavy hearts.

Mr. President, academic research revealed and predicted that Tuvalu will be the first island nation to be submerged under sea level; therefore, it had made Tuvalu a climate change icon. This fact had led us to believe that Tuvalu should be a 'climate change research center'. Hence, Mr. President, with the assistance of UNESCO, I urge that a climate change research facility is established in Tuvalu to coordinate scientific and qualitative research, regarding climate change.

Mr. President, many times, culture strengthened us and give us the ability to live through hardships. We should use culture more as a platform, where we fight to address issues such as climate change. In short, dynamic traditional frameworks should be produced to guide us and strengthened us. The triangular linkage between education, culture and sustainability is important to us, while we sail through this climate change era.

It is our sincere hope that UNESCO and small islands states such as Tuvalu work more closely. We need to save our local communities, in order to save our world.

Thank you & God Bless you all.

