

ECHOING THE VOICE.

President of the 40th General Conference.
Chair of the Executive Board.
Madam Director General
Excellencies and Distinguished Delegates.

I am delighted and honoured to be representing my country Nauru in presenting my statement today at this 40th UNESCO General Conference.

In Nauru we say “Ekamawir Omo ea kamie memak. Kind greetings to you All”.

Mr. President, Nauru’s land area is a mere 21 sqkm and lies 57km south of the equator. A single island surrounded by the vast Pacific Ocean. An island that is very much like my neighbouring islands where the impact of climate change can be seen. Soon my people will face the same aftermath of carelessness and negligence and a fate that will see displacement and homelessness of many, to describe the least grim scenario.

I hear the clamour of my fellow colleagues and other regions voicing their respective issues within these auspicious walls each trying to combat the feeling of ‘not being left behind’. What is involved in this simple yet complex mantra of ‘no one left behind’? As an island nation, I know my people are resilient but it is more than resilience of one, for it involves a dynamic force of will to help those who need to be empowered further for future sustainability of its people. It is about representation and hearing the other’s voice. It is about caring and sharing.

My children of today has evolved away from the culture and manner of my people of yesterday. As I stand here, I epitomize a new face of what my world may need in order to survive. Stamina, youthfulness, new ideas and a transformation based on a culture that may be seen as restrictive and cautious about innovation and modernism. A culture of traditional knowledge and courtesies. As I stand here, I have fears, for I face uncertainties and challenges, as I recognize that to be heard, I need to change. But to change I need unrelenting support.

I want my people to engage in a society where technology, innovation, climate mitigation etc is surpassing all things. Hence, I envisage a paradigm shift in Nauruan culture and its education system, curriculum, teaching pedagogies, to enable my young people to learn to adapt to the ever changing environment and to represent themselves on the international stage to be heard in a non violent and proactive voice.

We as Leaders are battling alongside our people to relearn about themselves through the introduction of vernacular, Nauruan studies and knowing one’s identity for future sustainability. At such a gathering like this, we are tasked with learning survival skills in the global world for future sustainability.

Mr President, It is a reflective time for all of us. We are continually reflecting on the evolving definitions of quality education, sustainable development, ethics, and encouraging inclusivity under the umbrella of, How best can UNESCO help or improve its services? On the other hand, what are we doing as Member States to help ourselves? Furthermore, how can we help UNESCO help us?

UNESCO has the mandate of peace building. We have at the community level especially at school level, the mandate for peace building through anti-bullying initiatives and like-minded programmes. Positive initiatives are being introduced through sports, health and well-being, and other activities that encourages peace and equality as seen through the involvement of both genders. Peace building can also be seen in the integration of asylum seekers into our schools and community at large.

The demands facing UNESCO's overarching objectives are many and these aspirations will simply be lip service if the wheels of UNESCO's vehicle goes around faster, and the gap between societies broadens. In the Pacific context we will ask ourselves, "Who missed the bus?"

Nauru has benefitted from UNESCO's support in fields of pre-service teacher education, cultural dialogue, policy development, literacy development for out of school youths, TVET skills development for unmotivated and at risk students, and exchanges of cultural talents among artistes, to name a few. We commend UNESCO's Category II Centres for their developmental programmes that they have shared with our people. More importantly, the UNESCO Cluster Office in Apia has provided well for our needs and can only further our progress with equitable provisions of budget and personnel.

Nauru continues to seek assistance in breaking barriers that harbours stereotyping, for instance, increased number of local male teachers and more women in parliament and in leadership positions, and developing strategic and responsible leaders.

Mr. President, I have stated a lot of how UNESCO has helped my nation. I have also stated the areas for future assistance. I have yet to answer the question of How can we help UNESCO help us?

I re-iterate that I the Pacific Islander should be empowered, EMPOWERED being the key word, through REPRESENTATION. Having a voice is empowering and we all have the right to represent ourselves given the opportunity.

Mr. President, Let my voice not only be a babel of tongues in this multitude.

We say "Tubwa kor" "Thank you very much."