



BELIZE'S INTERVENTION
at the 40th Session of the General Conference
of UNESCO

Hon. Patrick Faber, Deputy Prime Minister and
Belize's Minister of Education, Youth, Sport and
Culture.

Date

President, of the General Conference

President of the Executive Board

Madam, Director General

Excellences and Honourable Ministers of Government

Delegates and other distinguished persons

Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring you warm greetings from our beautiful jewel in the Caribbean and Central America. It is my distinct honour to share these remarks on behalf of the Government and people of Belize at a time of significant global changes which require consensus building towards peace and global prosperity, the very fundamentals of the UN and UNESCO.

It is therefore fitting that we recommit to working with a cooperative and earnest spirit to tackle global challenges such as the climate crisis which impacts our Belize Barrier Reef System, a UNESCO world heritage site. We recommit to supporting the

implementation of international laws and practices which respect the human rights of all global citizens, embraces diversity and affords security and prosperity for all humankind. We remain committed to supporting our youth recognizing their role in shaping the global agenda for peace. For as long as there is no other unifying system, UNESCO's role will continue to be important and Belize retains its operating principles. We do so with profound gratitude for UNESCO's unwavering support of Belize, especially in the education, culture and natural heritage sectors.

On this occasion then, I offer congratulations to UNESCO and all member states on the adoption of the new UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020-2025). It is aligned to SDG 4 which speaks to the need to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Literacy is perhaps one of the most important skill set for development of the person, community, and nation. The late Carl Sagan, American astrophysicist said "Frederick Douglas taught that

literacy is the path from slavery to freedom. There are many kinds of slavery and many kinds of freedom, but reading is still the path.” My colleagues, this focus on literacy supports liberation efforts.

Belize’s Development Plan, Horizon 2030, identifies two pivotal areas impacting our development:

1. The importance of productivity, competitiveness and skills upgrading to overall improvements to well being in Belize

AND

2. The need to address educational disparities that have affected the ability of the Government and the Private Sector to reach its maximum efficiency.

Both provided mandates for education.

As such Belize continues to invest heavily in education by allocating more than 25% of its recurrent budget. In doing so we have three core policy objectives:

- 1. Increase equitable access to all levels of education**
- 2. Improve the quality and relevance of education at all levels**
- 3. Strengthen governance throughout the sector with emphasis on increased accountability for student achievement.**

These strategic objectives are perfectly aligned with SDG 4 which calls on nations around the world to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning.

Our efforts are paying off. Belize's most recent evaluation of its sector strategy's performance showed that **access** to all levels of education has increased, from pre-primary to tertiary levels, and including technical and vocational education. We are not where we want to be as yet, so there is more to be done.

Average repetition and drop rates have decreased at all levels; but there are further reductions to be realized.

The transition rate from primary to secondary school have improved especially for children in the lowest wealth quintile, thanks to the government of Belize's poverty reduction strategies which included high school support for the neediest children.

The high school completion rates and performance on secondary school examinations have improved with a performance bonus for schools based on achievement using key quality indicators. You will find that we invest substantially on young people recognizing their role in the development of Belize and their role in shaping the global agenda for peace.

Belize join others in welcoming the adoption of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education, this being the world's first international agreement in higher education. In part, it will help people from all over the world to have their qualifications more readily recognized.

Technology will play an increased role in our global communications, inclusion and connectivity. Recognizing this, Belize's ICT Strategy in Education among other things, calls for the use of technology in promoting literacy and numeracy. The Government of Belize through the Ministry of Education is implementing its ICT in Education Strategy which seeks to transform education in Belize and forms a crucial part of the new sector strategy that will expand STEAM education with emphasis on inclusion of the Arts.

We continue to build on our successes by solidifying our intersectoral efforts to improve access by expanding our education and family support programs including the expansion of the government's school meals program, strengthening the support and inclusion of children with special education needs and the removal of user fees in all government owned institutions. The work to update and revise the curriculum from the pre-primary to secondary level is ongoing. Our current curriculum work is focused on ensuring that the

curriculum is consistent with the framework for Sustainable Development and that it fosters the development of 21st Century skills. We appreciate every support that we get.

The record will show that even as we look to learn from others, we also try to provide inspiration and leadership globally. My beautiful Belize provides for the world, a rich natural heritage site, in the form of the Barrier Reef, an exquisite coral reef ecosystem – a gift to the world. We work assiduously towards preserving it by minimizing local stresses caused by damaging practices such as offshore oil drilling. Belizeans' propensity for sustainability, is a direct result of education and deep appreciation of our roles as good stewards of our environment, its resources and this planet.

In the face of challenges which have emerged as a result of our global systems we look to lessons from the rich cultural tapestry we have woven in our little corner of the globe. We have learned that humanity stands strongest in the embrace of our diversity. It stands strongest when we can lift up and celebrate that which unities us as

well as that which makes us unique and diverse. On the eve of the celebration of the arrival of the Garifuna people to Belize - a distinguished people whose culture in 2001 was recognized by UNESCO as a “Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity”, let us take a page from their book. Educate the youth recognizing the role they will play in keeping peace and uplift that which brings out the best of our humanity.

Belize therefore invests in its youths, it preserves its partnerships and seek to cultivate new ones where values align. Our membership as a part of the Caribbean Community, CARICOM, has been important to us, as our full participation in SICA, of Central America.

Mr. President, we reaffirm our commitment to working through UNESCO to strive for lasting global peace and appreciate the efforts of fellow member states in doing the same. Thank you.