

SAINT LUCIA NATIONAL STATEMENT

40th General Conference

November 18, 2019

Mr. President of the General Conference, Madame Director General, Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Mr. President, I am pleased to convey congratulations on your election to the presidency of the 40th session of the General Conference. We wish you well and pledge our full support for a successful tenure. We wish also to express our appreciation to former president Mrs. Zohour Alaoui for her sterling leadership of the 39th General Conference.

Mr. President, two years ago, the government and people of the small island state of Dominica woke up to a country in ruins following the passage of a category five storm which flattened the island, leaving behind a nation and people devastated. Two years later, it is the island of the Bahamas which is now faced with the task of reconstruction following the devastating impact of hurricane Dorian. These tropical cyclones are both more frequent and more intense and are the concrete manifestation of the impact of climate change which represents an existential threat to our small island states, who we know are not the major contributors to this phenomenon.

Rising sea levels, the destruction of coral reefs and other marine biodiversity, the invasion of our seas by sargassum weeds, all seriously undermine the livelihoods of our fishing communities and our vital tourism industry.

The damage caused by these weather systems has major implications for our economic growth and development and underscores the vulnerability of our small island states.

Mr. President, this brings me to the important issue of the categorization of our states as middle-income countries, which continues to hinder our capacity to access overseas development assistance, necessary to address our socio-economic challenges. We wish to reiterate the urgent need for a revision of policies that determine access to developmental assistance based on GDP per capita. We note that within the UN System, some entities have adopted different approaches to Middle Income Countries. UNICEF is challenging these policies by focusing on the development needs and vulnerabilities of each country. UNESCO must follow suite. The governing bodies must engage in this important discussion, in order to facilitate access to much needed funding by small island developing states.

Mr. President, we wish to reiterate the calls made by others for the elevation of small islands development states (SIDS) to the level of global priority. In light of the major challenges facing small island developing states, this priority group cannot continue to be a priority on paper only. We know from the results of the evaluation of the SIDS action plan, that the requisite resources necessary for the effective implementation of this plan are wholly inadequate. We call for urgent action by the organisation to rectify this situation.

Mr. President, education is at the heart of St Lucia's development agenda. Having achieved universal primary and secondary education, we are now working towards the provision of universal early childhood education and expanding opportunities for our citizens to access higher learning.

Repositioning the role of technical and vocation education is also critical and we would like to express our appreciation to UNESCO for the support provided for the development of our TVET policy, which was finalized this September. This policy will provide the framework within which we can diversify our educational offerings to respond adequately to rapidly changing labour market needs and enhance the productivity of our citizens.

Mr. President, Saint Lucia is fully supportive of the UN 2030 agenda and is committed to its implementation. UNESCO has been assigned the important mission of leading on SDG 4. Its leadership in respect of this important goal constitutes the foundation upon which the achievement of all the other SDG goals can be fully realised. Its comparative advantage in education is therefore even more critical now as we work towards meeting these objectives.

It is for this reason that we must express our concerns regarding the slow progress in achieving this critical goal. The statistical data on global education is alarming and points to the need for urgent intervention. The organization must strengthen the capacity of the education sector and ensure that the requisite financial resources are provided to respond to this mandate.

The provision of policy guidance to member states to reform their education systems and support in the core areas of literacy, TVET, higher education and ICTs in education remain major priorities and are fundamental to meeting SDG 4. UNESCO must therefore adopt an approach which remains focused on the core mandate of the organization, while addressing emerging demands in education and responding to the needs of vulnerable groups and populations in crisis.

Mr. President, the contribution of culture to economic growth and development is evident. In that regard, we believe that to fully harness the economic benefits of our cultural heritage, the support provided by UNESCO under the various culture conventions is without parallel. UNESCO's support for the implementation of the culture conventions in Saint Lucia is therefore critical to building our capacity to effectively protect and safeguard our cultural heritage.

We urge UNESCO to continue its work in the area of heritage and sustainable tourism, which remains a priority for many island states, for whom, striking a balance between economic development and heritage protection remains a challenge.

Finally, Mr. President, Saint Lucia wishes to indicate its support for the amendments to the constitution in respect of the term limits, the assessed contributions and the election of the director general. For us, these three amendments represent significant improvements that will bring about positive changes for the organization in the future.

In closing, Saint Lucia wishes to reiterate its commitment to the ideals of UNESCO, and its support for the core priorities of this organization which seeks to build peace and contribute to the viability and sustainability of our societies.

Thank you.