

Speech of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Netherlands Antilles

Mrs. Omayra. V. E. Leeftang

Mr. President

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Minister of Education and Culture of the Netherlands Antilles, I am very honoured to once again participate in this General Conference. We would like to share some achievements with you.

Our educational system has experienced a renaissance since the formalization in 2007 of the Creole language Papiamentu, together with Dutch and English as official languages. Nevertheless we did not sit still following this formalization, but also focused our attention on having an official spelling of Papiamentu, which came out in the publication of "BUKI DI ORO", GOLDEN BOOK, in recognition of the language.

Furthermore the Government of the Netherlands has committed itself to pay more attention to so called minority languages in the Kingdom, in this case Papiamentu and English.

As I stand before you here today I am also proud to say that the First Catechism Written in Papiamentu Language submitted by the Netherlands Antilles has been included in the Memory of the World Register 2009 and also the Memory of the World Register for Latin America and the Caribbean.

Mr. President,

Last biennium we called UNESCO's attention to the fact that our Caribbean boys are falling behind in the educational system. We approached UNESCO through the Participation Programme for funding an investigation on gender differentials in school participation on the islands of the Netherlands Antilles.

The data collection phase of this research project has been completed and the results thereof will be presented during a national conference this November. Anticipating on the presentation of the final results, I can already state that there are indeed many different factors leading to the boy's educational problem of which society's demands and expectations, are the most crucial.

Our educational system seems to be in favour of girls.

Our research project indicates that the way we are teaching young children and students at school is very much female aimed, disregards the differences in learning, and does not make a distinction in interests between boys and girls.

We will share the results and proposals for solutions with the region and all who struggle with the problem of boy's underachievement. The project will definitely be a source for data driven policy reform in education.

Mr. President,

Globalization of Caribbean Small Island Developing States and Governance for Sustainable Development is the UNESCO Chair we are seeking to obtain for the University of the Netherlands Antilles. The establishment of a UNESCO Chair in the Netherlands Antilles will serve to document cases of the Small Islands States and to identify best practices, with specific focus on good governance, sustainable development and the creative economy.

Another proposed chair is on Water Technology. This Chair aims to be a centre of Excellence in the Caribbean Region and Latin America for high quality academic education and research.

Mr. President,

Two years ago I informed the Assembly of the important changes that the Netherlands Antilles is going through. I can inform you that the 10th of the 10th month of the year 2010, The Netherlands Antilles will cease to exist and we will welcome the birth of two autonomous countries within the Kingdom of the Netherlands; Curacao and St. Maarten.

I would like to ask UNESCO, its member states, especially our partner in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and other Associate Member States to support the applications of Curacao and St. Maarten to become Associate Members of this wonderful organisation when the moment arises. We count on each and everyone's support in realizing this.

In closing I express my gratitude to you all for listening in our three official languages

Masha danki, Dank u zeer, thank you very much!