



REMARKS
BY
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MINISTER OF EDUCATION, AND TECHNICAL AND
VOCATIONAL TRAINING
THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS
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GENERAL POLICY DEBATE
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BAHAMAS

Mr. President
Madam Director-General
Colleague Ministers
Representatives of the Various Delegations
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen
Good morning / Good evening / Good afternoon,

It is an honor and esteemed privilege to have this opportunity to address this 41st General UNESCO Conference as the Minister of Education and Technical and Vocational Training for the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

I bring greetings on behalf of our Governor General His Excellency the Most Honorable Sir Cornelius A. Smith and the Honorable Philip Davis, Prime Minister, and indeed the People of The Bahamas.

We congratulate UNESCO on the celebration of its 75th Anniversary. We are proud that The Bahamas has been a full member of this august body for 40 of those 75 years. We are gratified that over these decades we have participated fully and engaged in wide-ranging collaboration and cooperation.

The world has changed very much over these years and today we face emerging challenges which threaten our planet and all of its inhabitants collectively. One such issue is Climate Change and global warming.

We in The Bahamas understand this most painfully and all too well. Just last week our Prime Minister Philip Davis addressed the United Nations Cop26 Leaders' Summit in Glasgow, Scotland on this pressing matter of climate change. He advised that The Bahamas, my home, is among the 10 most vulnerable island nation states in the world. We understood this vulnerability in a most practical way in 2019 when our nation was hit by a category 5 hurricane called Dorian.

Dorian devastated significant portions of two economic centers in our country, the Islands of Abaco and Grand Bahamas. It killed untold numbers, the exactitude of which are still unknown, and left in its wake many traumatized by the horrific events which were witnessed first-hand by the many who

watched loved ones die and had to fight to save their own lives, in the 23 foot high wall of water and 185 mile force winds and tornado activity.

The cost to us of that hurricane is estimated in the region of \$3.4 billion and impacts on the economy that will last for years, and we are still in the midst of picking up the pieces in many ways, including in the delivery of education on those affected islands. Dorian was the culminant of a series of devastating hurricanes which preceded it.

Our Prime Minister pointed out at the Cop26 Conference that as an ocean state our translucent waters provide a carbon sink which benefits the world, yet we are victimized by climate change substantially brought on by activities in third party states.

There are no silos in the global environment and we must operate and cooperate symbiotically, engage in give and take for the harmonious systems for the planet's survival. It is certainly true, as elucidated by John Donne, 16th century English poet, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." Some may recall that, as far back as 2012, The Bahamas hosted a UNESCO Climate Change Conference to help to bring a focus to this critical matter.

Not long after Hurricane Dorian we experienced the COVID 19 pandemic which has impacted the entire world. We in The Bahamas have certainly not escaped the tremendous fallout wrought by this deadly and disrupting virus.

The process of educating our children has been acutely affected by this pandemic and we have experienced challenges on all fronts varying from access to WiFi, in some instances access to electricity, challenges in providing

child supervision in homes, managing student attention in a virtual instructional mode and access to virtual learning devices.

I must acknowledge the generous support from civil society, and kind individuals to the work of the government in addressing these deficits.

I believe most of us here know the road ahead is challenging as it relates to the phenomenon of lost learning for our children, and I know that each of us in our respective states will do all that we can to mitigate any losses sustained during this period.

In the Bahamas we will not rest. Our people are courageous and resilient and filled with the resolve that we will work to ensure our country is one of the finest little countries on the face of the earth, and that our people are given the best opportunities possible.

We also understand the critical link between the delivery of education to the individual development of each child and the collective success of a nation.

We are most appreciative for the work of UNESCO in its provision of critical data, timely research and considered recommendations to help redress the challenges we face and help us to build upon our strengths.

We are also grateful for the collaboration with UNESCO in the development and implementation of the framework which resulted in The Bahamas becoming a State Party to Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention. Pursuant to this we have submitted Nomination Papers for the inscription of our indigenous National Cultural Festival of The Bahamas - Junkanoo - an amazing mix of rhythms retained and evolved since the crossing of the Middle Passage. In essence, a celebration of freedom demonstrated in dance.

Junkanoo is an art form significant to the national identity of our people, commemorative of our historical journey and in urgent need of safeguarding for generations yet unborn and for enrichment of world cultures. It is of note that the traditional celebrations and annual parades have been suspended during the restrictions brought on by COVID 19. Yet another painful loss for our people. We are hopeful that the strength and beauty of this cultural expression can be raised up and protected.

Our recent collaboration with UNESCO also includes the participation of delegates from The Bahamas in the V Regional Forum on Education Policy, Education Management Information Systems in the Latin American and Caribbean region, and we are preparing for participation in the upcoming 16th Intergovernmental Committee meeting for the Intangible Cultural Heritage in December 2021.

In youth development the collaboration between the National Commission and the NGO Young Marine Explorers is proving impactful. The project is based in one of our less developed islands - Cat Island - and is set to develop a Biosphere Reserve on that island. Approval was given for a UNESCO grant to support the work of this project.

Despite our acute vulnerabilities and ongoing challenges, we have dug deep and determined that we will create a new day for our people, that we will bring about the necessary adaptation and implement pragmatic change to secure the future progress of our people.

In this regard we are re-envisioning virtual learning for our archipelagic state, developing policy that is data-driven, actively reviewing the curriculum,

facilitating life-long learning and professional development for our educators and establishing universal pre-primary education.

Our mission is to provide a qualitative educational experience that is equitably accessed and which allows each child to develop his or her potential and which will enure to the social and economic strength of the Bahamian people, and to the global input for the advancement of all mankind.

In recognition of the substantive and qualitative relationship with my nation, The Bahamas reaffirms its pledge and commitment to fully honor the goals, as articulated by UNESCO, and to declare our full partnership in the development of this work.

Finally we are offering ourselves for membership on the Executive Board. We are hopeful that members will see the value of our experiences, our unique insight and our dogged commitment to the ideals as articulated by UNESCO as valuable inputs to the higher participation of decision-making.