



41st General Conference of UNESCO
Paris, France, 9 November – 24 November 2021
Remarks by the Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport
of St. Maarten,
The Honourable drs. Rodolphe Samuel

President of the General Conference,
Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Director-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Greetings from the friendly island of Sint Maarten.

Mr. President, the Government of St. Maarten congratulates you, upon your election as President of the 41st session of the General Conference and I wish you every success during your presidency.

It is such an honor and distinct pleasure for me to address the General Conference virtually for UNESCO's 75th Anniversary.

Mr. President, as Minister responsible for Education, I support the upgrading of teachers' digital skills, knowledge and the utilization

of distance, blended or hybrid teaching and learning. Thus, I would like to commend UNESCO's global and regional response to COVID-19, which helped countries to mitigate the disruptions to schools and learning caused by the pandemic.

UNESCO's regional capacity building initiative to upgrade ten thousand (10,000) Caribbean teachers in twenty (20) Small Island Developing States (SIDS) helped to strengthen teacher capacity to implement quality distance and blended learning programs.

I am pleased to report that teachers of Sint Maarten, who participated in these online trainings, acquired the necessary digital skills to enhance learning for students within the blended and virtual classroom context. The continuation of such trainings by UNESCO is welcomed as they support countries in their process of providing quality education (SDG #4) for all.

I am also delighted to share a recently confirmed partnership with our Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth, and Sport, the University of St. Martin, and the University of the Virgin islands, to provide professional development opportunities for educators and aspiring educators.

To ensure continued learning for all students during school closure in beginning phases of the pandemic, the acquisition and provision of digital devices to students in need was a priority for my ministry. Through the 'inspiring our Students with Technology in Education Project (iSTEP)', students and teachers of Public Education Schools, received devices to facilitate learning

continuity. The private sector, social clubs, and individual donors were also encouraged to sponsor devices and data for students.

Mr. President, it is now four years since Sint Maarten was devastated by a category 5 hurricane, and as a Small Island Development State, promoting mitigation strategies and providing adequate support for building the resilience of the effects of climate change is vital. Sint Maarten applauds UNESCO for the installation of a unit that is dedicated to the necessities of the SIDS, and supports the SIDS Group call for an advocacy plan and a resource mobilization strategy for SIDS within UNESCO. We, like other SIDS countries, look forward to SIDS being recognized as a Global Priority.

In the area of Culture, Sint Maarten intends on co-ratifying the Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage as a country within the Dutch Kingdom. We continue to expand on our national ICH inventory and promote our rich cultural heritage via our awareness campaign, 'I Remember Intangible Cultural Heritage' (IRICH).

Mr. President, Sint Maarten supports and embraces Anti-Doping practices. With the approval of our application by the Fund for the Elimination of Doping in Sport, a 'No Doping/No Drugs Anti-Doping awareness campaign' along with education and training programs on anti-doping, will be executed through the Department of Sport, the National Sports Institute, and St. Maarten Sports & Olympic Federation.

In closing, this year, Sint Maarten celebrated its 10th Anniversary as an Associate Member of UNESCO. It is our goal to continue to

build on successes and develop new initiatives in the area of Education, Culture, Science, and Communication and Information, in our continued efforts to uphold the ideals and mandate of UNESCO.

Sint Maarten reconfirms its commitment to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We will continue to safeguard and invest in our cultural, documentary, and digital heritage, and focus on the provision of quality education in our schools and initiating professional development opportunities for our educators and aspiring teachers.

I thank you!