



SAINT VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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**Speech delivered by
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Representative to the Executive Board**

**on behalf of
the Honourable Curtis King
Minister of Education and Reconciliation**



Mr President of the General Conference,
Mr Chairman of the Executive Board,
Madam Director General,
Ministers, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

I have the honor to address this forty first session of the General Conference on behalf of the Honorable Curtis King, Minister of Education. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines congratulates you, Mr President, for your assumption of the presidency of this General Conference. You can count on our cooperation and we wish you every success.

St Vincent and the Grenadines congratulates you, Madam Director General, on your reelection. We look forward to continue to working with you and your teams.

We welcome the Åland Islands as an Associate Member of UNESCO.

The current times need unity and solidarity more than ever. To this end, multilateralism and an effective international cooperation are crucial. Without cooperation, the world, despite all the difficulties, would not have been able to cope with the Covid 19 pandemic which affected our health, social, economic, educational, cultural, environmental, communication and information systems.



The pandemic is not only a health crisis; it is also a catalyst for rethinking the way we want to live in the future. Decision-makers have an opportunity to move away from the status quo and make positive changes for the benefit of humanity. Yet there is room for improvements at the short, medium and long-term by ensuring vaccines for all peoples, sharing science and knowledge, combat misinformation, thus increasing global and financial cooperation to reduce massive inequalities and vulnerabilities.

In this regard, we welcome UNESCO's work on the two recommendations on Open Science and on Ethics in Artificial Intelligence. The timing of these normative instruments is ideal to alert the international community that scientific knowledge and experiences must be shared and to ensure that new technologies are used for positive transformation. Therefore, UNESCO must continue to play its role within the United Nations system to face the emerging challenges and to fully contribute to the 2030 agenda through its fields of competence which are more relevant than ever.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of education systems and highlighted the need for new educational strategies. The rapid shift to virtual classrooms has saved many children around the world, but disadvantaged those living in poverty or in areas lacking technological infrastructure. In these times of technological revolution, equality in education must be closely monitored to ensure that no child is left behind.



In addition, we further encourage the development of critical thinking in curricula, so that future citizens are properly prepared to sift fact from fiction and able to interpret data. In this area, the role of UNESCO International Bureau of Education is essential.

Therefore, we witness UNESCO rapid response to the Pandemic by adapting solutions and supporting member states to ensure, as much as possible, distance learning and policy advise. Yet there is a need to increase funding in education and develop effective strategies to ensure quality education in all its forms, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

Mr President, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines is also facing the recovery from the damages resulting from the eruption of La Soufrière volcano in April 2021, thanks to UNESCO emergency response and also to the region assistance. Here we also underline the critical situation in Haiti after the earthquake. This brings us to highlight the issue of climate change.

We are so far from the implementation of Paris agreement. As the Small Island developing states are threatened to disappear and to their peoples to be displaced, we urge all stakeholders to implement their commitments to reach tangible results.



In this regard, we commend the work of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) in its activities in ocean sciences, in mitigation and adaptation to climate change, multi-hazard disaster reduction, in tsunami early warning systems and tsunami ready programme. We believe that the human and financial resources of IOC should be reinforced to properly continue its activities.

Mr President, it was an honor for St Vincent and the Grenadines to serve at UNESCO Executive Board during the last 4 years. We worked on the creation of UNESCO Unit dedicated to the SIDS, and on many issues related to UNESCO's reforms, to the implementation of UNESCO's Programmes and Conventions, such as protection of heritage, access to information, freedom of expression, media development, anti-doping in sports, the status of the artists.

We commend UNESCO's work in launching innovative initiatives to maintain cultural industries which were damaged by the Pandemic, as we believe that Culture is an essential pillar for the evolution of the societies.

St Vincent and the Grenadines is candidate to the World Heritage Committee. If elected, we will continue our work with commitment and cooperation with the States Parties.

As I close, St. Vincent and the Grenadines stands firm to uphold the mandate and the values of UNESCO.

I thank you for your attention.