



Speech for the 41st General Conference of UNESCO

by the Minister of Finance and Culture of Aruba

Her Excellency Mrs. Xiomara Maduro

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President of the General Conference, Chairperson of the Executive Board, Director-General, Excellency's, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Mr. President, on behalf of the Government of Aruba, I congratulate you on being chosen to preside over the 41st session of the General Conference of UNESCO. Despite all the restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, communities all over the world have found remarkable ways to work together and collaborate for our common ambitions and goals.

The UNESCO is no exception, and the great UNESCO-family is grateful for the platform provided by all the stakeholders within the UNESCO-family to 'keep business as usual' by providing training, webinars, presentations, and forums online. It's an honor to be able to participate by sharing my thoughts with you, even if it is remote and not physical.

Mr. President, we thank UNESCO's response to the COVID pandemic in our region with the pilot-program for the **Professional Development of Teachers for Blended Learning and Online Strategies**. This training is benefitting teachers throughout the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Sustainability is inseparably linked to preserving our heritage, so in addition to digitization we embrace the use of our mother tongue, Papiamentu, while also embracing a multilingual approach in education, the so-called Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education. The availability of Open Education Resources (OER), as advocated by the UNESCO, remains of crucial importance, therefore. The Associated Schools Network has proved to be a catalysator for innovation and quality in education. Since this year the National Commission for UNESCO of Aruba has been motivating the schools in Aruba to be a participant of this network.

Reaffirming that education is the most powerful vehicle for sustainable development, the Government of Aruba confirms its commitment to **SDG#4: to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.**

Mr. President, Aruba's economy leans heavily on tourism. This is an industry characterized by the danger of excesses and great risks for the preservation of heritage. It is also an industry based completely on what Aruba and its people have to offer culturally. For this reason, we should make continuous efforts to show the importance of a balance in global and local cultural policies, our way of doing business and the way we live. We have enough examples, also in Aruba, where preservation and development with respect for our heritage, go hand in hand.

In order for our society to be more conscious about the important role of culture in innovation for sustainable development, creative industries and social action, the focus on cultural education will be a priority for our government. I applaud UNESCO's continuous support by means of capacity building in the Dutch Caribbean, especially on the field of intangible cultural heritage and the promotion of cultural expressions with a focus on cultural entrepreneurship. I strongly believe that we need to use culture, guided by the Culture 2030 Agenda, as the bonding factor between the SDG's.

Mr. President, Aruba is a Small Island Development State within the Dutch Kingdom. The current natural disasters have shown us how vulnerable SIDS are. The government of Aruba recognizes all vulnerabilities associated with the impact of tourism on our natural heritage and is taking the necessary measures to mitigate the risks and negative effects and actively encouraging other relevant stakeholders to do so. I can proudly say that we have a great example on the island: we have the only hotel in the Caribbean that is **Certified Carbon Neutral**. And this week its owner is a speaker at the COP26, and will be honored for his achievement. I'm convinced that we can use this model to educate others in the tourism industry and achieve a global impact.

The National Commission for UNESCO of Aruba is an active member of the IOCARIBE. Investment in ocean science and awareness of the risks of Climate Change are important topics for the SIDS, as is the concrete implementation of programs and initiatives in the context of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. Given the limitations of a majority of SIDS in funding scientific research, we welcome UNESCO's significant contribution in trying to expand the possibilities of Open Science, especially in the Caribbean Region.

Mr. President, the National Commissions for UNESCO of the Dutch speaking islands have formed since 1987 a strong bond and the cooperation between the islands and within the Kingdom is excellent.

On behalf of the Government of Aruba, I congratulate UNESCO for its 75 years and we are grateful for giving all the member states this unique platform. We can confidently say that UNESCO has passed the test of time and will keep transforming lives by building peace in the minds and hearts of men and women all over the world!

Dear all, to conclude I would like to express my gratitude in the most spoken languages on the island of Aruba: ***Masha danki, Dank U wel, Muchas Gracias, Thank you and Merci Beaucoup!***