



41ST SESSION OF UNESCO GENERAL CONFERENCE

GENERAL POLICY DEBATE

STATEMENT DELIVERED BY MS. ALISSANDRA CUMMINS,

HEAD OF DELEGATION,

BARBADOS

15 NOVEMBER 2021

President of the General Conference,

Chairman of the Executive Board,

Madam Director General,

Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

Barbados salutes you, Mr. President for your election to this august position and looks forward to working with you to give effect to UNESCO's work over the next two years.

We take this opportunity to also congratulate Mme. Director General for her election for a second mandate, and wish to assure her of Barbados' support and commitment to her initiatives which point to the crucial reform process now being undertaken.

Barbados also takes this opportunity to warmly welcome the Finish province of the Aland Islands as the 12th associate member of the UNESCO Family and looks forward to working closely with this new member in pursuit of mutually beneficial endeavours.

At this time of the COVID pandemic UNESCO demonstrates its value in the field of multilateralism providing as it does a critical framework for global action, particularly when taking on board UNESCO's pursuit of initiatives such as the work on advancing both the recommendations on Open Science and on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence. Barbados especially commends the focus on the "need for a balanced, inclusive, transparent, participatory and multistakeholder process" to address the chronic state of the digital and knowledge divide between developed and developing countries.

We welcomed the invitation to the Barbados National Commission to host UNESCO's online consultation for the English and Dutch-Caribbean, in August last year where our Prime Minister the Hon Mia Amor Mottley took the time to congratulate the organization on this new initiative which had the capacity to support "...major researchers, laboratories, academic institutions to work together to achieve the common goal of the health and well being of humanity ...[through] a process that must be embedded in common values and principles to which we have all contributed to articulate concrete policy measures guiding the ethical design, development and deployment of Artificial Intelligence at the service of all of humanity." Unquote.

In fact it is the organization's activism in this regard which has worked effectively to help reduce the epidemic of inequalities which followed the onset of the pandemic, through the sharing of scientific knowledge to respond to global emergencies, to combat misinformation amongst the most vulnerable, and increase the resilience of affected communities through the development of new knowledge, the advancement of new technologies and the advocating of new information protocols for encouraging increased levels of resource mobilization and health cooperation.

Barbados particularly wishes to express its appreciation for UNESCO's invaluable contribution to education and culture during the COVID19 pandemic, especially through the development of excellent ICT resources for primary education and in the ongoing delivery of relevant training to teachers in the Caribbean, enabling online dissemination of critical resources and materials through e-learning platforms to SMART classrooms for the region's youngest and most vulnerable.

Education and Communication remain at the heart of many of UNESCO's initiatives as does the importance placed on equitable and inclusive approaches in this regard. As a small island developing state (SIDS), Barbados remains committed to supporting UNESCO's key programmes, particularly the IOC and IHP as their work is critical to the survival of water scarce communities such as ours. The outcomes of COP-26 have amplified the urgency of global efforts to address the Climate crisis and its impact on SIDS.

Measurable progress can be made through DRR education and resilience initiatives which are key, especially in the context of national, regional and international efforts to preserve and conserve natural and cultural heritage. Recent natural disasters including Hurricane Elsa in July 2021 have resulted in crises of increasingly violent proportions in the Caribbean and elsewhere, and have provided compelling evidence of the value of DRR. Barbados is convinced now more than ever of the importance and efficacy of the information network of related Tsunami early warning systems to which we continue to contribute.

The DG's reinvigoration of efforts to support the SIDS agenda through the development of a dedicated unit within the Science sector, and the allocation of additional resources to support the ongoing development of SIDS as a priority group within UNESCO is especially worthy of note and very encouraging. My delegation is satisfied with the progress made two years onward. Nevertheless, it must be made clear that Barbados remains committed to the move towards establishing SIDS as a Global Priority, alongside those of gender equality and Africa, in order to achieve critically important and systemic change in UNESCO's

perspectives and programmes, particularly in terms of the achievement of the 2030 agenda.

Barbados particularly welcomes the opportunity to serve again on UNESCO's Anti-Doping in Sports Approval Committee for the coming biennium and will seek during this period to advance a creative model with regard to communication and marketing, to further facilitate funding to promote anti-doping policies and processes across the Americas region, as well as building the bonds towards unity and harmony across sports and countries.

Barbados has remained resolute to its commitment to the Slave Route programme, as it relates directly to its history, cultural and heritage. We support the articulation of a new strategic framework aimed at renaming, reframing and reinvigorating the project with new orientations and ambitions so as to increase its impact, viability and visibility, particularly in the context of the implementation of the second half of the International Decade for People of African Descent. Barbados particularly appreciates the DG's efforts to strengthen its inter-sectoral, multidisciplinary and inter-agency initiatives within the United Nations system and in the context of external partnerships.

Barbados continues to support the precepts of the cultural Conventions and has actively engaged with major programmes in particular the Safeguarding of Intangible heritage, Cultural Diversity and World Heritage conventions, especially in the area of capacity building.

In respect of the latter Barbados is offering itself for election to the World

Heritage Committee and looks forward to sharing its vision and expertise with the rest of the world, but particularly will be providing a strong voice, commitment and perspective for SIDS and issues of protecting World Heritage from the effects of Climate Change, and most particularly, African heritage.

In this regard, I also wish to signal Barbados' interest in hosting the 47th Session of the World Heritage Committee, in 2024 which coincides with the conclusion of the International Decade of the People of African Descent. Barbados subscribes to its underlying theme "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development" and commits itself to *promoting a greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies".

Finally, Barbados is pleased to join in the celebration of the 75th Anniversary of UNESCO, given its enduring relevance and eloquence to promote a culture of peace particularly through education, science and cultural action.

Thank you for your attention.

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