



Papua New Guinea Country Statement
By
HONOURABLE JIMMY UGURO, MP
Minister for Education
at the
41st Session of the UNESCO General Conference

15 November 2021
Paris, France

Mr President,

Madam Director General,

Colleague Ministers,

Excellencies, and

Distinguished Delegates,

1. Thank you for giving me the honor to address the 41st session of the UNESCO General Conference.
2. It is indeed an honor to be part of this meeting to reemphasize the importance of education and to accelerate actions towards the 2030 Agenda.
3. At the outset, Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you on your appointment, as well as Madam Director General for her re-election.
4. I also take this opportunity to thank the outgoing President for the courage and leadership throughout the last (2) years which has been extremely challenging.

5. Mr. President, the value and importance of education cannot be overstated. It is indeed the backbone of the overall development success and a driver of long term economic growth.
6. Papua New Guinea's Medium-Term Development Plan (MTDP) III 2018-2022 recognizes the need to prioritize the improvement of quality education and skills development. This was underscored through the country's launching of the National Education Plan 2020-2029 earlier this year.
7. Mr. President, schools have a special role in promoting gender equality and give opportunities to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to ensure no one is left behind. Papua New Guinea through the current Government is providing support to parents with subsidies, scholarships, loans and full tuition fees.
8. The last 10 years have seen marked increase in all school aged children educated up to the 12th Grade in the formal school system. At the same time alternative education pathways through Flexible and Distance Education has been prioritized and is freely provided for those who are unable to complete their education. Our FODE enrollment has increased almost 100% this year. Further plans to have all secondary schools to offer faculties and spaces will go a long way in order to achieve the goal of leaving no one behind.
9. Despite these efforts, given the country's geography and a growing population, the challenge to ensuring an equitable, accessible and quality education remains.
10. Mr. President, the role of culture and traditional knowledge is of great importance in our societies. Being a country of more than 800 different tribes and languages, Papua New Guinea welcomes the integration of cultural protection concerns into security and peace-building efforts and looks forward to continue working in partnership with UNESCO in the future.
11. Papua New Guinea stands in solidarity with the other "Big Ocean States"

in the Pacific region to reiterate on the need to take responsibility in limiting global temperature. Climate Change is a real threat that requires the global community to take immediate actions. The scientific evidence is clear that the frequency, intensity and duration of climate related extreme events have affected the vulnerable and the marginalized communities. Therefore, we urge UNESCO to support those Small Island Developing States like Papua New Guinea to mitigate severe impacts of the natural disasters and emergencies.

12. Mr. President, education is a crucial component to addressing these issues. All relevant government systems should be supported to acquire the mostly needed knowledge, skills, tools and adequate funding to prevent and manage, not only climate change but natural disasters and other risks as well. Traditional knowledge, early warning systems, communication and improved technologies are areas that should be strengthened in partnership with UNESCO.
13. Mr. President, I take this opportunity to congratulate UNESCO on its 75 years of building peace through education, culture, information, and science. Allow me to convey Papua New Guinea's sincere gratitude for the adoption of UNESCO's Medium Term Strategy for 2022-2029. My country looks forward to work in collaboration and partnership to achieve our collective goals.
14. As you are aware, Mr President, the tragedy of the Covid-19 pandemic is having a profound impact on the lives of millions of people across the globe. In Papua New Guinea, an estimated 2.4 million students have experienced disrupted learning during the country's lockdown measures to minimize the spread of Covid-19.
15. Students across the country have also lost valuable hours of instruction. Many were also slow to return to the classroom due to fear of contracting the virus. May I also add that the social media and fake news are not helping us in our fight to contain and mitigate the pandemic.
16. The Pacific Heads of Education Systems virtual meeting held in Port Moresby in June 2021, with the support of the UNESCO regional office,

brought together relevant stakeholders and development partners to deliberate on commitments that strengthen efforts for the continuation of education during emergency periods. The meeting agreed for the use of ICT as a key strategy in delivering uninterrupted education in the region.

17. Mr. President, whilst this crisis has brought unprecedented challenges for both the people and the society, I am optimistic that this brings a wave of inspiring new ideas to respond and adapt to the new normal. Innovation, science and technology are more important now than ever before, therefore UNESCO and other development partners' support will be crucial.
18. Mr. President, I conclude by calling for increased collaboration and partnership by all sectors and between UNESCO members states to ensure we do not exacerbate current challenges, but strengthen and develop resilience to continue to progress SDG 4.

I thank you.