

REMARKS BY  
THE HONOURABLE T. DESMOND  
BANNISTER

AT THE UNITED NATIONS  
EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND  
CULTURAL ORGANIZATION 36<sup>TH</sup>  
ANNUAL CONFERENCE

PARIS, FRANCE

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Madam President ;

Madam Chairman;

Madam Director General;

Excellencies;

Representatives of the various delegations;

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen;

Good afternoon.

I am honoured to have this opportunity to address you at this 36<sup>th</sup> General Conference, and to thank all of you for the support which you have given to a fellow Bahamian and world citizen, Dr. Davidson Hepburn during his tenure as President of the 35<sup>th</sup> General Conference of this venerable body.

You will agree that Dr. Hepburn executed his duties with great passion; and that he embodied all of the values which UNESCO stands for namely - PEACE, RESPECT for CULTURE and THE ENVIRONMENT and most importantly, promoting EQUALITY OF ALL PEOPLE OF

THE WORLD. Although, he has only recently demitted office, I am certain that he will continue to promote these causes, even if he embarks on what now appears to be a promising career in music.

We are thankful that through his efforts UNESCO hosted two significant events in The Bahamas – The UNESCO Handicraft Exhibition, and the Experts Meeting on Climate Change and Sustainable Development in Small Island Developing States. The Experts Meeting permitted us to actively participate in the dialogue on the critical issue of climate change and to benefit from the vast pool of knowledge which was readily available during the Conference.

The handicraft exhibition highlighted the fact that this industry may significantly assist in our quest to eradicate poverty among the youth and among the marginalized in society. Accordingly, we have this month completed the construction of a new Straw Market in historic downtown Nassau, to accommodate 544 vendors and craftsmen.

We have also passed legislation to ensure that only indigenous products may be sold in this new market, as we view the development of the Handicraft industry as a vehicle which will permit us to create new opportunities and linkages for Bahamian artisans and entrepreneurs.

Madam President, we are less than two and half years away from the close of the United Nations Decade for Education for Sustainable Development. In The Bahamas we have worked steadily towards the achievement of the goals to which this period subscribes. Every child in the Bahamas now has access to free primary school education and free high school education. Having achieved these access goals, we have now focused on educational reform to ensure that education in The Bahamas remains relevant to the needs of our society.

Our reform encompasses pre-school to tertiary education. We continue to establish more pre-school units in our primary schools thereby providing greater access to free public preschool education. Madam President, we believe

that if a solid educational foundation is provided for the youngest children; we will be investing in a brighter future for all.

Madam President, we remain mindful that students with special needs require quality education also. Accordingly, a very important component of our reform plan is focused directly on this population. We continue to integrate special needs units and autistic units into preschools and primary schools; and prevocational units for special needs students into high schools. I'm pleased to report that our Centre for the Deaf has incorporated the production of straw craft into the curriculum. The quality of the work that is produced by these students is exceptional, and affords them the opportunity to be self employed in this multi-million dollar industry.

We continue to streamline Technical and Vocational Education offerings with national development goals so as to ensure that we have a technically skilled workforce; and this year we have opened a Career Academy as a major

thrust in equipping students with skills for the job market in the areas of Hospitality Management, Construction Trades and Business Studies.

As with most of our CARICOM colleagues, we have fulfilled many of the Millennium Development Goals relative to education and are working feverishly to improve our Literacy and Numeracy rates even as we continue to indigenize our curriculum so that students may acquire global concepts easier within a cultural context. In this respect we have developed Language Arts material that has won a Commonwealth Best Practices Honourable Mention award for content.

Madam President like you, we firmly believe that **Education is an indispensable element for achieving sustainable development.** Accordingly, we continue to invest the lion's share of our national budget in education, so as to ensure that we remain focused on the task of educating global citizens.

**Thank you, and good afternoon.**