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Remarks by the Minister for Education, Youth Affairs and Sports
Honourable Sharie B. de Castro

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President of the General Conference
Chairperson of the Executive Board
Director General
Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

Greetings on behalf of the government and the resilient people of the British Virgin Islands. It is a distinct honor to address the 42nd Session of the UNESCO General Conference and to extend our warm congratulations to you, Madam President, on your well-deserved election. We wish you every success in the execution of your duties during this pivotal session.

Under the purview of the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs, and Sports, I am delighted to share some significant developments in the British Virgin Islands that underscore our commitment to UNESCO's overarching aim.

Firstly, I am delighted to share with you the recent celebration of the 80th anniversary of secondary education in the Virgin Islands. This milestone not only reflects our progress but underscores our unwavering commitment to advancing education in our region. As we stand at the intersection of tradition and transformation, we are resolute in our mandate to Move Virgin Islands Education: Full S.T.E.A.M. Ahead by ensuring that our students have access to the skills critical for innovation in the present and future while embracing their cultural heritage.

S.T.E.A.M. Education, an embodiment of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics, dovetails remarkably well with UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4: Quality Education, and Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure. These goals underscore the significance of inclusive and equitable education and the fostering of innovation and infrastructure essential for sustainable development.

As a small island developing state, the support provided by UNESCO has been invaluable to our progress. The British Virgin Islands has keenly felt the impact of climate change, evident in the devastating floods and hurricanes of 2017. The recent global pandemic has further underscored the importance of Distance Education and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in education. We are convinced of the necessity of embracing these modalities to ensure resilience in our educational system.

UNESCO can play a pivotal role in assisting the BVI in the realm of S.T.E.A.M. Education. Collaborative efforts can be directed towards capacity-building programs for educators, providing them with the necessary tools and training to effectively implement S.T.E.A.M. methodologies in classrooms. Through targeted and ongoing professional development initiatives, we aspire to cultivate a cadre of educators who are not only well-versed in their respective fields but also equipped with the skills to foster creativity, critical thinking, and a love for learning in their students.

Recognizing the global teacher shortage, the Ministry of Education has introduced Let's Teach VI, a recruitment and retention initiative as a call to action, aiming to recruit new, untrained, and inexperienced individuals into the teaching profession. We look towards UNESCO for support in further developing and refining the Let's Teach VI initiative, leveraging UNESCO's global experience in teacher training.

Furthermore, UNESCO's expertise in curriculum development can be harnessed to create contextually relevant and culturally sensitive materials that enhance the learning experience for our students. The BVI seeks UNESCO's guidance and support through technical assistance in policy formulation, program design, and project implementation. The BVI has recently introduced S.T.E.A.M. Innovations as a subject in the secondary curriculum. This addition aims to expose students to robotics, coding, engineering, and digital literacy, fostering skills that transform them into pioneers and innovators.

Our commitment to infrastructure spans from the physical structures that house our learning environments to the technological backbone that facilitates modern teaching methodologies. The completion of the Elmore Stoutt High School Redevelopment project signaled the return of full day school in January 2023 for the first time since the natural disasters in 2017. We are also currently nearing the completion of a primary school on the sister island of Jost Van Dyke to ensure that all students have access to quality education. The construction of a school specifically designed for the inclusion of differently abled students has also recently begun and has been identified as one of the few of its kind in the region.

The Ministry's commitment extends beyond the academic realm to youth and sports development. The reintroduction of government-funded afterschool and summer school programs is crucial to providing children with additional support. Recognizing the vital role of sports in achieving UNESCO's SDG goals, we are committed to nurturing sporting talents and promoting physical well-being among our youth. Despite being a small country, we are making waves on the global stage, as exemplified by Kyrin McMaster's silver medal in the 400-meter hurdles at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest. We eagerly look forward to a podium finish here in the Paris Olympic Games in 2024, a testament to the potential and determination of our athletes.

In conclusion, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to you Madam President and the esteemed members of the UNESCO General Assembly for your unwavering support and collaboration. In the spirit of unity and shared purpose, let us continue to build bridges, break barriers, and create pathways that lead to a world where education is not just a right but a transformative force for a brighter, more inclusive, and equitable future.

Thank you.