



BVI National Commission for UNESCO

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**The Honourable Andrew A. Fahie
Minister of Education and Culture for the British Virgin Islands
Policy Debate Address
Message for The thirty-Fifth General Conference of UNESCO, Paris, France,
9th October 2009 (afternoon)**

**Mr. President
Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board
Director-General, Excellencies
Distinguished Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I greet everyone with the peace of the Great God of the Universe.

I bring you greetings from the Government and people of the British Virgin Islands. I count it an honour to join you at UNESCO Headquarters and for the opportunity to reaffirm the British Virgin Island's commitment to the ideals of this vital and relevant organization.

Mr. President, permit me to congratulate you on your election as President of the 35th Session of the General Conference; a responsibility I am confident you will assume with honour and dignity.

For over six decades, UNESCO has promoted the highest standards in education, science, culture, communication and information. UNESCO has equally fulfilled its mission of forging meaningful collaborations in these fields among its member states and other stakeholders. This mandate is clearly stipulated in the Mission Statement of the Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013, a document which unmistakably defines the strategic orientation of UNESCO.

At this juncture, I humbly pay tribute to all those visionaries who made UNESCO a reality, and to those persons who remain true to its mission, spirit and ideals. It is in this spirit that I commend the Director General for his exemplary leadership as one who transforms the ideals of UNESCO into the living policies and programmes which are integral to today's developing societies.

On behalf of the Government of the British Virgin Islands, I would like to congratulate Ms. Irina Bukova, designate to the post of Director General of UNESCO. It would be remiss of me if I did not publicly thank the Bulgarian Government for their financial contributions to aid in strengthening National Commissions in the Caribbean and sub-regions, making it possible for the British Virgin Islands to benefit from a visit by Secretaries General from Jamaica and St. Kitts and Nevis earlier this year.

We all agree that given the current global situation, we are compelled to increase our efforts to promote peace among all humankind to establish an environment which fosters the development of its people and the society.

Mr. President, the British Virgin Islands is an associate member state consisting of 60 islands, islets and cays. The Government is dedicated to building a territory where all its citizens are provided with opportunities to reach their full potential. Access to a quality education is a high priority area and the impetus by which we will promote

equality and opportunity for our people so that they can actively participate and contribute to the development of our Territory. That is why we are continuously working toward “*Quality Education for All*” (EFA) by 2015 supported by the motto “*Moving from Good to Great*” which is central to achieving our goals and objectives.

An area of concern is the offering of knowledge and skills to those students who are passing through the education system but not performing adequately. In order to help them develop the skills needed to enter the work force, we have started to develop a Technical/Vocational programme however we experienced many challenges with this programme. We understand that our Government needs a Technical/Vocational education policy for the Territory as well as to develop plans and programmes to address this situation. We acknowledge that in this rapidly developing world it is the knowledgeable and skilled citizens who will best make their way in our globalized world. Our provisions in Technical/Vocational education must not only meet the needs of those students who require skills to

ensure that they can be productive but must also target some of our best students who tend to be attracted only to the professions in medicine, law, accounts etc. We understand that we need to strike a balance in developing both skilled workers and citizens who are able to acquire vocational skills to become employable in a productive, competency-based work environment.

We have noted with interest the model provided through the esteemed UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre, which fulfills the United Nations' mandate to promote peace, justice, equity, poverty alleviation, and greater social cohesion. We will be calling on UNESCO to assist the British Virgin Islands in training and developing internationally recognized educational policies and protocols so that we too remain relevant in the 21st century.

Culture is an important component of UNESCO's work and we would like to see a strong emphasis placed on areas such as promoting cultural exchanges, linking culture and education, providing an integrated approach to the preservation of cultural and natural heritages.

Through a UNESCO approved participation project, we are working toward putting a Cultural Policy in place which will produce a framework for the Territory for further cultural development. Given our geographic location in a hurricane belt, we cannot escape the threats of natural hazards and also the harmful impact of global warming and climate change which we know may result in flooding and rising sea levels. However, projects such as “*Youth PATH*”, Youth Poverty Alleviation through Tourism and Heritage, “*Small Islands Voice*” and “*Sandwatch*”, provide the catalyst for us to encourage our young people to take responsibility for our environment.

Mr. President, the British Virgin Islands have benefited from our membership and association with this august organization. We therefore pledge our commitment to ensure that every BVI resident remains a strong advocate for UNESCO and its ideals. **Mr. President**, I have no doubt that with the unwavering support of member states; UNESCO will continue to rise above the global challenges and will seize every

opportunity to successfully fulfill its mandate for the benefit of all mankind.

I thank you!