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**PERMANENT DELEGATION OF JAMAICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

Address to Plenary

By

**The Honourable Olivia Grange, CD, MP
Minister of Culture, Gender, Entertainment and Sport**

**210th Session of the UNESCO Executive Board
Tuesday, 2nd December 2020**

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished colleagues,

Jamaica supports the statements delivered (to be delivered) on behalf of GRULAC and also the Non-Aligned Movement.

We are meeting in challenging times, against the background of a devastating pandemic that has impacted the lives of many, in more ways than one.

UNESCO and other UN Agencies have not themselves escaped the impact of this pandemic as it is this unfamiliar reality that has catapulted us to be meeting in this format and circumstances. In two weeks, I will preside over the virtual meeting of the 15.COM, a new experience for me, and indeed all of us.

I place on record my sincere gratitude to the Secretariat for the herculean efforts to hold statutory meetings in accordance with constitutional requirements, albeit under revised protocols and utilising available technological platforms.

The prevailing circumstances require Member States to adapt, pivot as some would say, to ensure the continuity of business and of life. International organisations likewise, have maintained commendable steadfastness of purpose. We are obliged to equip UNESCO to continue to make inroads in all areas of its mandate, and respond nimbly to changing circumstances. The pandemic is a difficult test for all concerned, and I recognise and thank the Director-General and her staff for their admirable actions and indefatigable work.

For us in Jamaica, our engagement with UNESCO and its Programmes has now shifted to online interactions, ably facilitated by the Kingston Cluster Office. We welcome our new Director, Dr. Saadia Sanchez and the Programme Specialists in Education, Social and Human Science and Natural Science, and to offer them our usual Jamaican cooperation.

We also said 'adios' to Katherine Grigsby, the previous Director of the Cluster Office in Kingston. I want to place on record my personal appreciation and that of my Government, for her valuable contribution during her 5-year tenure.

Mr. Chairman,

UNESCO's shift to virtual platforms created opportunities for us to participate in and contribute to a wide range of virtual activities where we have effectively

engaged our local stake holders. In fact, we have wider interface via the virtual platforms, as travel and other related costs are no longer impediments.

We are coming to the end of the Medium-Term Strategy and Programme and Budget. The prospect of crafting new guiding documents brings renewed hope and vision for the Organisation, grounded in new paradigms and political, economic, environmental, and other considerations.

In this context, Jamaica underscores the importance of maintaining sharp focus on Education, while continuing to address other vital areas such as Culture, Sports, Climate Change and Artificial Intelligence. We recognise and value the efforts made in this regard in the recent Medium-Term Strategy.

For us, the inclusion of SIDS as a Global Priority is of extreme importance, as such a development would realise our long held aspirations for recognition of this Group of countries within UNESCO. Moreover, it would also serve to enhance the relationship with SIDS globally, including across other international organisations.

We reiterate our support for maintaining Priority Africa, Gender and Youth as Global Priorities.

The continuous alignment with the SDGs must be more pronounced as we move towards a stronger Medium-Term Strategy and Programme and Budget.

I make mention of the UN Secretary General's 2019 Report which concludes that no country is on track to achieve the 17 SDGs. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 has kicked the ball much further down the road, but we must meet this challenge of our time. Mr. Chairman, National Commissions continue to play a central role within the UNESCO family. It is crucial they receive adequate support to effectively undertake their responsibilities. National Commissions will need increased capacity for Strategic Planning for SIDS and appointing Focal Points in field offices for SIDS, are also recommended.

I congratulate NatComs for sustaining their individual and collective growth and development by sharing experiences and expertise resident among them.

Jamaica reiterates a firm commitment to upholding the mandate of UNESCO and to working with all of you to empower the Organisation to meet its objectives in service to humanity.

I thank you.