



KINGDOM OF LESOTHO

STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND
TRAINING

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TO THE 39TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE
UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND
CULTURAL ORGANISATION (UNESCO)

PARIS FRANCE

NOVEMBER 2017

Madam President of the General Conference,
Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board,
Madam Director General,
Excellencies and Colleagues,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour to address the 39th Session of UNESCO General Conference. On behalf of my country, Lesotho, I wish to congratulate you Madam President for your election as a President of the 39th Session of the General Conference.

Madam President

I also wish to indicate that today; we stand here to honour and congratulate the first woman to have been at the helm of UNESCO - Ms. Irina Bokova, for all her accomplishments at UNESCO and to express our deepest appreciation for her outstanding leadership. As she indicated in her maiden speech on the occasion of her installation as Director General eight years ago, I wouldn't agree better with her that indeed her accession on that high office has sent a message of confidence to all women throughout the world and that women are capable of assuming leadership positions and can lead in the world we live in today. As we speak today, there are many women who have ascended to decision making positions not only within UNESCO, but in our respective governments' structures.

Madam President

We meet once again for the 39th time in the history of our organization in order to make an appraisal of the world educational, scientific, cultural and communication situation. It is in the above context that I intend to reflect on what my country has achieved or failed to achieve in UNESCO's priority areas and fields of competence. But before doing so, may I commend UNESCO for having put all strides together in tackling all its main domains despite the financial recession that the organization has been going through for a decade now.

Madam President

Lesotho re-affirms its commitment to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. I should also like to mention that my country is particularly prioritising Sustainable Development Goal Number 4, as it proves to be the pillar of all the 16 other goals. To this end, our Ministry of Education and Training, has already taken action in incorporating SDG 4 in the National Education Strategic Plan. We have also taken it upon ourselves in drawing the attention and pressing for timely and concerted action of all national stakeholders on this issue at hand.

Madam President

You will again note with interest that the government of the Kingdom of Lesotho has allocated the greatest share of its budget towards the education sector. This is due to the fact that it faces challenges emanating from poor quality education at basic level, as well as limited basic infrastructure and equity. With the budget allocated under my ministry in 2017/18 financial year, our target is the intensification of the schools inspections in order to provide support to teachers and school's management to discharge their duties with utmost professionalism and dedication. Moreover, the intention is to provide inclusiveness and equity in education. All these efforts are geared toward achieving goal

number four. We however, appeal for further UNESCO's continued support in order for Lesotho to achieve the said goal and also in addressing challenges faced by the education sector in the country

Madam President

The High Level Ministerial Panel Discussion on SDG4 –Education 2030 held on 1st November, 2017, in which I also took part, demonstrated how effective management and accountability in public education finance can substantively contribute towards moving the Education Agenda 2030 forward. It is therefore our commitment as government of Lesotho to continue investing in education with accountability in order to achieve SDG 4 targets.

Madam President

UNESCO Natural Science programme remains one of our greatest focus areas. We live in a world where the acknowledgement of STEM as a driver of development cannot be overemphasised. As the world embraces the crucial importance of digital literacy, Lesotho has also made huge strides to participate. In the impending lack of laboratory infrastructure and other resources, we are fully aware of the huge potential of digital resources to promote STEM. We have harnessed the power of tripartite partnerships involving government, non-governmental organisations and private sector to pursue the advancement of digital literacy. In particular we wish to recognise an Africa wide initiative to train African youth in coding 'Africa Code Week'. We are aware that UNESCO supports this initiative and we are proud to mention that after having joined ACW in its second year, 2016, Lesotho came in 3rd position after Morocco and Cameroon in relation to the number of youth trained per 100, 000 of the population.

This year to advance the course of STEM and digital literacy, with funds from the Participation Programme of UNESCO, we have procured a solar powered digital Mobile Laboratory with the aim of reaching the

remote and off grid schools of Lesotho. In all of this the enhancement of the participation of girls in these traditionally male dominated disciplines is one of the primary focuses. Seeing the low participation of women in leadership and especially STEM related fields, Women in STEM is another programme that we have decided to pursue mainstreaming gender into our national ICT Policy is a top priority.

Madam President

Access to knowledge is a human right. It is necessary to achieve full human potential and inclusive development because it opens doors to education, employment, improved health, and social and political participation. However, the lack of published works in formats that are accessible to persons with print disabilities (known as the ‘book famine’), means that the right to read and acquire knowledge is often out of reach for those who are blind, visually impaired or otherwise print disabled.

It is in the light of the above that my country would be ratifying the Marrakesh Treaty which calls for Access to Published Works for Visually Impaired Persons. Lesotho recently held a sub-regional seminar in collaboration with The Electronic Information Libraries (EIFL), with the intention of making a leveled playing ground for the adoption of the treaty in the country, and also encouraging other countries in the region to follow suit. It is therefore my fervent hope that UNESCO will play a leading role in ensuring that member states adopt the Marrakesh treaty for people with print disabilities.

Madam President

The North South and South-South Cooperation involving Lesotho and her sister countries in the Southern African region gains strength year after year through the support of both the Korea and German Commissions for UNESCO.

The former continues to provide learning opportunities to educationally marginalised communities in Lesotho through what is called “the Bridge Africa Programme”.

The German Commission for UNESCO supports Lesotho in the training of final University students on entrepreneurship skills as a way of addressing youth unemployment. Over 500 unemployed youth have been trained and a number of successful small businesses have been created through this initiative thus far.

Madam President

Lesotho recognizes Tourism as a growth sector and we are committed in improving our tourist attractions as one of the strategies to grow this sector. We are grateful to UNESCO and some of our partners, with special mention of the German Commission for UNESCO and the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation in their continued support to assist Lesotho establish its first Biosphere Reserve.

Madam President

In conclusion, let me reiterate the role and relevance of UNESCO in contributing to peace and security by promoting nations through Education, Science, Culture and Communication. Therefore, as the government of the Kingdom of Lesotho we remain committed to the founding principles of UNESCO and shall endeavour to support this important organisation.

I thank you all for your attention.