



## **Speech of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Netherlands Antilles**

**Mrs. Omayra. V. E. Leeflang**

Mr. President of the General Conference,

Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board,

Director-General,

Excellencies,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Government of the Netherlands Antilles, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on being chosen to preside over the 34<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference of UNESCO.

I wish you continued success in the conduct of the proceedings.

Congratulations are also in place for the latest member of the UNESCO family, Montenegro becoming thus the 192<sup>nd</sup> Member State of UNESCO on 1 March in London.

It is a great honour for me to take part in this conference.

Mr. President

The educational system in the Netherlands Antilles is experiencing a renaissance in terms of the implementation of innovations.

Since 2002 structural reforms have been taking place at all levels.

We came to the discovery that we did not lack plans for education and formation. But due to the amount of fragmentation in formation and education plans we had lost sight of the child.

For this reason the Ministry did not choose for a new education policy, but for a performance operation plan, a strategy to reach the child. Bringing together and connecting all education and formation programs, in a mutual consistency and precise focus, thus making it privileged for all young people.

Reference is made to the so called: "Delta Plan".

The delta plan is a seven tiered programme with three specific goals by the year 2011:  
Firstly, solve the problem of dropouts  
Secondly, solve the problem of Youth unemployment  
Thirdly, introduce an education system that offers developing opportunities to all young people.  
(Education for All)

The Dutch government has embraced this plan and has pledged to fund it as it offers realistic prospects for a brighter future for all Antillean children and addresses the migration problem of unprepared youngsters to the Netherlands.

The most important program of the delta plan is the compulsory education from 4 to 18 years. This programme goes hand in hand with the compulsory social formation act, so that students who don't use the opportunity in school will still be under social compulsory formation until the age of 24.

Organizations such as, The Netherlands Antillean Fiscal Committee as well as the Treaty for Economic Social and Cultural Rights refers to the Delta Plan as a successful tool for dealing with the drop-out problem, unemployment among the youth and to make youngsters successful in the community.

Mr. President,

It is a well known fact that the UNESCO emphasizes the education of girls and women, and rightly so. However, our Caribbean reality is that boys and men constitute the minority in the educational systems. We cannot permit that they are left behind in the educational process.

Mr. President,

We will be approaching the UNESCO for financial and technical assistance in helping us complete an investigation on the Gender differentials in school participation on the islands of the Netherlands Antilles, in particular the attendance of boys.

It is unheard of that our educational system seems to lose these young men even before they have the necessary basic qualifications to be able to function adequately in the labor market.

This research should give us "the actual state of affairs regarding the participation of boys and girls in education, but also to identify the crucial moments in the drop out process and the push and pull factors that influence this process."

Mr. President,

The Act of Parliament regulating the official status of the three main languages spoken in the Netherlands Antilles, a program of the delta plan, is no small feat. English, Dutch and Papiamentu have been given an equal and official status. I am proud to say that all three languages may be used as the lingua franca as well as the instructional language within the educational system.

Especially for Papiamentu, a creole language, this is a very significant achievement in the process of its emancipation.

No longer can this language be referred to as "dialect" or "inferior language, as was the case in the past.

Mr. President,

We firmly believe that the UNESCO should continue to support the cultural diversity that exists, now more than ever since the adoption of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions during the last General Conference. We can proudly say that the cultural policy of St. Maarten has become a reality thanks to the technical assistance received from the UNESCO.

Mr. President,

Urban water problems are growing more complex and intense worldwide. Water is a basic necessity for all and should not be limited because of the lack of resources. We therefore fully support the possibility of having access to Water For All as the Millenium Development Goals calls for.

Mr. President,

We are pleased to see that Associate Member States are slowly but surely getting the necessary attention they deserve and urge the UNESCO to continue in this way.

In conclusion, I would like to state that this year marks an important year for the country Netherlands Antilles, as we will enter into a new constitutional form in which Curacao and St. Maarten will have to apply for associate membership to the UNESCO.

Mr. President,

We count on the support and assistance of the UNESCO in helping us fulfil this milestone in the history of the Netherlands Antilles.

And that, two years from now Curacao and St. Maarten can be welcomed within the UNESCO family.

I thank you!