

Remarks

By

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Thank you for inviting me to bring greetings at this symposium. UNESCO is most pleased to be associated with and supporting this important initiative which brings together young people from around the Caribbean to discuss issues and challenges facing young people and suggest approaches to addressing them.

Let me take this opportunity to congratulate two outstanding artistes, Stephen and Ziggy Marley, on their recent Grammy Awards for “Best Reggae Album” and “Best Musical Album for Children” respectively. These awards represent the rewards for their dedicated labour in the music industry and are tremendous inspirations for Caribbean young people.

The theme of this meeting, “*Crime don’t pay: Unity Brings Prosperity*” reflects your commitment to contribute to dialogue and to finding solutions to one of the most pressing issues affecting young people today. UNESCO is particularly pleased to be involved in this initiative as frequent discussions with stakeholders in education and culture across the sub-region have more and more frequently highlighted the shared concern about the rise in crime and violence among young people across all Caribbean countries.

The Caribbean region has become increasingly affected by the problem of widespread crime and violence which have reached alarmingly high levels in countries such as Jamaica and have become more significant in countries that were previously characterized by relatively low levels of violence. Crime and violence have extended to areas of society that were previously quasi immune from such phenomenon, including schools and demands swift and apt interventions on the part of governments and other stakeholders throughout the region.

It is within this context that UNESCO and the Government of Jamaica jointly organized the First Forum of Ministers Responsible for Social and Sustainable Social Development in the Caribbean in Kingston on 24-26 January this year to discuss strategies for addressing the challenges facing the region’s young people in the context of the global

financial crisis. Among other things, the Forum emphasized the need for greater social investment in youth and recommended that each Caribbean government establish a high level mechanism to provide leadership, coordination, mainstreaming and follow-up on the implementation of national youth policies.

According to the January 2010 report of the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development (CCYD), murder rates in the Caribbean are higher than any other region of the world and youth are primarily the perpetrators as well as the victims of crime and violence. The effects of crime and violence are widely visible in the media reports in most Caribbean countries; the lost tourism revenues as a result of crime has reached in excess of US\$200 million per year for the Caribbean region and overall youth crime is costing the region at least 7% of its Gross Domestic Product. The areas of youth crime and violence have therefore become increasingly important in the light of the magnitude that the phenomena have gained over the past decade in this region.

At UNESCO, we are aware of the direct and indirect effects of cultural reorientation and education on violence reduction, including on the risk of being involved in criminal activities: by providing increased social trust; addressing social and economic inequalities and reducing poverty; and yielding better qualifications and higher earnings which are both directly linked to reduced crime opportunities. For this reason, we are contributing to efforts in the Caribbean to provide targeted life skills training for young people, their parents and community leaders, to build capacity in conflict management and in youth poverty alleviation initiatives which target reduction of youth unemployment as one of the core causes of youth violence.

Our collaboration with the Bob and Rita Marley Foundations is uniquely important since it seeks to engage young people in finding solutions to some of the pressing problems and challenges facing them. This symposium is indeed timely and attuned to the cultural reality of Caribbean young people. I wish you all fruitful discussions, which can lead to a better understanding of the actions to take to address crime and violence in the Caribbean.