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VIRTUAL

REMARKS BY MINISTER FAYVAL WILLIAMS,

MINISTER OF EDUCATION AND YOUTH OF JAMAICA

(Submitted electronically due to technical difficulties during the live session, at the Fourth Plenary Session held on November 11, 2022 )

* OAS Secretary General, Mr. Luis Almagro Lemes
* Minister Raquel Kismer de Olmos. Ministry of Labor, Employment

and Social Security of Argentina. Chair of the Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML)

* Mrs. Kim Osborne, OAS Executive Secretariat for Integral Development
* Colleague Ministers of Education

Good morning everyone,

The Ministry of Education and Youth of Jamaica highly values the partnership of the Organization of American States and in particular the programmes undertaken by the Inter-American Teacher-Education Network (ITEN). The teacher development programmes, focusing on STEM education have reached over 19,000 teachers, approximately (80%) of the teaching profession. The duration and sustained quality of the programmes resulted in Jamaica having a core of trainers of trainers in STEM approaches.

In recent years, Governments of advanced nations across the world have placed a particular emphasis on improving the quality of education in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM). This reflects the critical importance of STEAM disciplines for modern society. They empower our citizens in so many important ways. Science and Mathematics provide answers to the fundamental questions of nature and enable us to understand the world around us. Expertise in STEAM disciplines is necessary to drive our economic ambitions, support innovation and provide the foundations for future prosperity. Knowledge-based economies are particularly dependent on the quality and quantity of STEAM graduates. Providing STEAM education of the highest quality is essential if Jamaica is to deliver on its ambitions to be a hub of technological creativity and a leader in innovation.

Increased post-secondary STEM enrolment has been designated as a national imperative by the Ministry of Education and Youth (MoEY). This role recognizes the vital need for Jamaica to raise the degree of creativity and critical thinking necessary for future employment and economic success. This is our strategy for Research and Development, Science and Technology, and highlights the critical importance of excellence in STEAM Education to ensure the continuous development of a pipeline of talent to support both Local and Foreign Direct Investment and an active ecosystem for indigenous start-ups. To accomplish any or all of the purposes and objectives of STEAM education, clearly educated and trainable individuals who can adapt to the changing environment and its requirements are required.

We must address the country's unequal access to technology and weak physical infrastructure. Above all, we must improve fundamental literacy abilities. Efforts to promote STEAM learning will be hindered if secondary pupils continue to struggle with reading comprehension. To address this, we have implemented the Specialist Subject Teacher approach at the elementary level, intending to improve the teaching and learning of English and Mathematics.

Furthermore, under the new National Standards Curriculum (NSC) for grades one through nine, which seeks to improve students' overall academic performance, attitude, and behaviour, an emphasis is being placed on project-based and problem-solving learning, with Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM/STEAM) integrated at all levels.

We can proudly declare that the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Information is already implementing the wide embrace of STEAM education as one of its strategic goals, rather than merely as distinct discipline to be taught.

We also recognize that to deliver a world-class STEAM education to our children, our teachers must have access to high-quality training and professional development programs and resources.

The Jamaican government believes that all young people should have free access to science, technology, engineering, and math education. We are aiming to achieve this by making it simple for STEAM educators and others to access subject-specific professional development programs.

The Ministry's goal is to increase the number of students who graduate from high school with certification in a practical skill-based topic, and we have been emphasizing project-based and problem-solving learning, with STEM/STEAM being incorporated at all levels.

Now, my esteemed colleagues, the relationship between ITEN and the Jamaica Teaching Council has strengthened and broadened its coverage to include four other Jamaican institutions. Jamaica also participated in multilateral projects implemented in 10 other member states. Such initiatives permitted collaboration in designing innovative programmes to train teachers of all levels on STEM pedagogies and methodologies. ITEN awarded over USD 100,000 in financial contributions in the form of Seed Grants to Jamaican institutions to implement new teacher professional development programmes, and provided Teacher Fellowship and Leadership Funds, to individual teachers so they could improve their classroom practice and leadership skills. STEM tool kits were also provided for the Trainers of Trainers.

Now that the Ministry of Education and Youth, is accelerating its advancement into the digital space and the STEM/STEAM policy has been. The Ministry is also engaged in establishing 7 STEM Academies. To this end The Ministry of Education and Youth, through the Jamaica Teaching Council (JTC) is currently negotiating a new Memorandum of Understanding with OAS/ITEN to expand partnerships for professional development in STEM approaches and programmes. We in Jamaica encourage Member states to continue to support ITEN in its teacher development programmes for 21st century learners.

Over the years of cooperation with OAS interventions have been directly aligned to the Education System Transformation programmes. The interventions have been inclusive of pre-service and in-service teachers and cover, scholarships, seed grant, study tours, collaboration with other islands, conferences and webinars. The programme has reached schools, colleges and universities,

Jamaica is well on its way with Phase II of the Education System transformation. The objective is to equip educators and students to function effectively in the everchanging digital space. While progressing in this direction, we are committed to an education system rooted in human development as its primary goal, promoting values and attitudes that are consistent with a sustainable human society and undergirded by equity and justice for all.

Over the next few years Government will establish STEAM schools because for us in Jamaica the ARTs must be included in any transformation of education. To this end, we will endeavour to train more pre-service and in-service teachers in STEM/STEAM education. The engagement of our boys in education are of concern to us as they tend to lag behind the girls. Hence, we continue to be engaged in initiatives to motivate participation of all learners.

We recognize the role of early childhood education as the first step towards sustainable human development and are in the process of investigating the present curriculum with a view to make it more effective in laying the foundation for character building.

We welcome the continued partnership of OAS and, in particular OAS/ITEN, as we address the learning gaps created by the COVID pandemic and simultaneously advance the system in an ever changing environment.

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