

**TALKING POINTS FOR CLOSING REMARKS BY
OAS ASSISTANT SECRETARY GENERAL NESTOR MENDEZ**

THE NINTH INTER-AMERICAN MEETING OF MINISTERS OF EDUCATION

Nassau, The Bahamas, February 10, 2017

Hon. Jerome Fitzgerald, Minister of Education, Science and Technology of the Commonwealth of the Bahamas and Chair of the Inter-American Committee on Education (CIE)

Other Honorable Ministers of Education of the Hemisphere

Officials from the OAS and other International Organizations

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me start by thanking the Honorable Jerome Fitzgerald, Minister of Education, Science and Technology of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas and Host of this Ministerial for his leadership in organizing the Ninth Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education. Minister Fitzgerald and his team, led by Mrs. Janice Knowles and the Bahamas Delegation to the OAS, were invaluable to the success of this meeting. En nombre de la Secretaría General de la OEA, reciba nuestras más sinceras felicitaciones.

The approval here in Nassau of the Inter-American Education Agenda (IEA), a roadmap designed to strengthen Inter-American cooperation and build alliances to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, is a milestone for the Americas.

- **The Agenda** and its three main priorities --1) Quality, inclusive and equitable education; 2) Strengthening of the teacher profession; and 3) Comprehensive early childhood care-- **will help advance education in the Hemisphere and be an important tool to support OAS Member States in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.** It will also represent an important guide that will help the OAS streamline its work in the education sector.

- In the last decade we have seen great progress in access to primary education, as well as great improvement in secondary and tertiary education.¹ But access to quality education remains a major concern.

¹ In the last ten years, primary enrollment has moved from 84% to 95%, secondary enrollment from 66% to 74% and higher education enrollment from 19 percent to 33 percent, according to the U.N. Statistics Division.

- As recently noted by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), The Development Bank of Latin America (CAF) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in the Latin American Economic Outlook 2017,² less than one-third of young Latin American and Caribbean people aged 25 to 29 have received some form of education at college, university or a higher level technical school. Many leave school too early: as a result, a third – 43 million – have not completed secondary education and are not enrolled in school.

Our region also exhibits the widest gap in the world between the available pool of skills and those demanded by firms. This creates a challenge for the region because we know that 65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately be working in completely new types of jobs that do not yet exist. Even "old" jobs will look radically different in

² OECD, CAF and ECLAC (2016). *Latin American Economic Outlook 2017: Youth, Skills and Entrepreneurship*. Paris/Santiago: 2016, p 17.

workplaces transformed by technology, changing demographics, and globalization. So we must prepare.

- Our education systems must provide our young people with the core competencies to thrive in a rapidly globalized and interconnected world.
- Here I would like to pause and remind the Ministers of the great opportunities offered by the OAS scholarship program, which grants scholarships every year to students of OAS Member States to pursue Masters and Doctoral Degrees, and a range of advanced training certifications at some of our hemisphere's leading Universities and Research Institutes. Students receive a world class education while simultaneously experiencing a new culture and learning a new language. Cultural and language exposure would provide our young people, particularly those of the Caribbean, with a competitive advantage in the business world and in international organizations, which require language competencies. I believe that it is absolutely imperative for our young

people to be equipped with the necessary tools to take advantage of the many opportunities our hemisphere offers.

- The OAS has a unique advantage in being able to convene meetings of Ministers from all sectors of Government to share ideas and work together toward more comprehensive policymaking and complementary programming to support education, workforce development and inclusion. With the approval of the Inter-American Agenda for Education, Ministers have endorsed cooperation, and signaled their priorities and a commitment to action and progress.
- The IEA is also an opportunity for international organizations and other stakeholders to build alliances in support of Governments' efforts. Let me again thank our partners at the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank, The Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), UNESCO and the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI), for joining forces with the OAS and its Member States in supporting the implementation of the Agenda.

- I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the work carried out by the OAS Executive Secretary for Integral Development, Mrs. Kim Osborne, and her team, in particular Maria Claudia Camacho and Paulina Valdez, in support to the Chair of the Education Ministerial process.
- To conclude, I wish to reiterate what Secretary General Almagro mentioned in his opening remarks: “We have an obligation, a responsibility, and a duty to ensure that future generations are architects of their own destiny. All peoples of the Americas, without regard to race, gender, place of birth or sexual orientation, must have access to quality and inclusive education, be empowered to aspire to quality jobs and more sustainable models of existence.” End quote.
- Education is the key to success and the foundation for a prosperous society. The OAS remains committed to working with all of you, our partners, in this important endeavor.

THANK YOU