



REMARKS BY
THE HONOURABLE JEROME K. FITZGERALD
MINISTER OF EDUCATION,
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
AT THE
OFFICIAL OPENING CEREMONY OF THE
9TH INTER-AMERICAN MEETING OF
MINISTERS OF EDUCATION
AT THE
ATLANTIS RESORT, PARADISE ISLAND
THURSDAY, 9TH, 2017
9:00 A.M.

Salutations:

- **The Right Honourable Perry Gladstone Christie, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas;**
- **His Excellency, Luis Almargo, Secretary-General of the Organization of American States;**
- **Education Ministers from throughout the Americas;**
- **Ministers of Government;**
- **Members of Parliament;**
- **Distinguished reverend gentlemen and Ladies;**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps;**
- **Permanent Secretaries and other senior Government Officials;**
- **Conference Delegates;**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen,**
- **Good morning!**

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the 9th Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education (9IAMME), and welcome you to Atlantis Resort, Paradise Island, in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

These two days provide us with an extraordinary opportunity to chart the course for education in the 35 countries that comprise the Organization of American States (OAS). When we come together, and we share lessons learned, and ideas and strategies for the way forward, we all grow stronger. There is a lot of expertise and a lot of passion in this room, and I know we are all ready to harness that energy and channel it into new policies and collaborations that will make a real difference to the students and educators whom we serve.

Many of us spend a great deal of our time thinking about the children who are most vulnerable in our countries --- who seem to begin their lives with the deck stacked against them. We know that for many of these children, school can be not just life-changing, but life-saving.

So it is an awesome responsibility we have – to make sure that our nations’ schools are as good as they can be, that our teachers have the support and the ongoing education and resources they need to not just educate but to change – and in some cases -- save lives.

When we last came together in Panama City in February 2015, I spoke about the effects of education on a nation’s ability to prosper. At that time, I challenged us to embark on social reconstruction through education.

2015 was a defining year and placed us at a critical juncture of transitioning from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While the Millennium Development Goals provided the global framework from 2000 to 2015; the Sustainable Development Goals provide the global blueprint from 2015 to 2030.

As you are well aware, Sustainable Development Goal 4, which is specific to education, mandates us to “ensure inclusive and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning.”

The Organization of American States remains committed to making this a reality.

To manage our work, three areas of priority have been identified: These are:

1. Quality, Inclusive and Equitable Education
2. Strengthening the Teaching Profession, and
3. Comprehensive Early Childhood Care

How do we reach and serve all of our students? How do we upgrade our curricula and standards? How do we make learning life-long? How do we reward excellence? How do we support creativity and innovation? How do we integrate new research into teacher education? How do we best expand our system to our youngest learners, and what does a quality preschool education comprise? These are questions that confront Ministers of Education every day, and over the course of this meeting, the work we are doing in these areas will inform our discussions and negotiations. Collectively, we bring many thousands of hours of real-world problem-solving on the front lines of education to these joint efforts to determine the actions needed to make the goals of the Inter-American Agenda a reality.

Ministers, ladies and gentlemen, we are on the verge of an historic event: the adoption of the first Inter-American Education Agenda (IEA) by OAS Member States. This Agenda will serve as the framework for the OAS's work in education and will provide a strong foundation on which to build our hemispheric cooperative efforts in education.

We must now commit our resources - our time, talents and treasure - towards animating the lines of action of the Agenda and strengthening the institutions tasked with coordinating this work, particularly the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development.

The way forward requires a commitment to partnership and alliance-building. I hope that the presentations and dialogue today and tomorrow will strengthen our relationships and form the basis for cooperation in the years to come.

We owe it to all of our students, from the very youngest to the very oldest, to provide them with the best possible opportunities to thrive; and we can only do that if we push forward, every year, past the obstacles, to a renewed commitment to make our schools truly excellent.

I am so honored to welcome you as Chair of the 9th Inter-American Meeting of Ministers of Education, and as Host Minister; I can assure you, that all of us in The Bahamas will do our best to make this meeting a resounding success for the Organization of American States.