Sint Maarten Declaration

School Safety in the Caribbean

The Third meeting of Ministers of Education, High-level Authorities of the Education Sector, and representatives of Regional and National Disaster Risk Management Agencies, on the Implementation of the Caribbean Safe School Initiative

30th June 2022

We, the Caribbean Ministers of Education, High-level Officials of the Education Sector, jointly with youth and interested stakeholders, having participated in the Caribbean Safe School Forum from 28th to 30th June 2022, examined critical issues impacting disaster risk management and its relevance to the education sector in the Caribbean region. We also express solidarity with all people and countries affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and offer condolences and sympathy to the families of the victims of the pandemic, and those whose lives and access to education have been affected by it, especially in the Caribbean. In that context:

We recognize the Caribbean Safe School Initiative (CSSI) launched in Antigua and Barbuda in 2017 as the suggested framework to advance school safety in the Caribbean guided by the Regional Road Map on School Safety, and the Antigua and Barbuda Declaration on School Safety.

We reaffirm the right to quality and inclusive education for all.

We further recognize that the geographical location of the Caribbean region and our development aspirations influence our exposure and vulnerability to natural, biological, anthropogenic, or societal hazards (including various type of violence) that can potentially cause disasters.

We further recognize the threats that climate change and climate variability, biodiversity disruption and the declining health of the ocean pose to the countries and territories in the Caribbean, and which will increase in intensity and frequency with devastating impact on people, the environmental cover, the built environment, and the education system in particular.

We acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic, as a manifestation of the systemic nature of risk that global societies all face, has underlined the urgency to address disaster risk reduction whilst building resilience.

We further acknowledge the need to improve risk knowledge and risk perception in all sectors, at multiple levels, including education; within the school curriculum (curricular and extracurricular learning) as well as training and preparation of the school community (principals, staff, students and families); and programming of the Local National Disaster Offices/Departments and Ministries of Education.
We emphasize the need for communities to improve their ability to maintain and restore vital services in a more timely manner and to build back better.

We note with concern that the human and financial cost of disasters is rapidly rising, trapping countries in a continuous cycle of emergency response, curtailing governments in their capacity to grow and develop, and impacting the right and access to education for all.

We further recognize the diversity of recent biological, societal, geological and meteorological hazards and their cascading impacts in the Caribbean, such as hurricanes Irma (2017), Maria (2017), Dorian (2019), the volcanic eruption in St. Vincent and the Grenadines (2021), hurricane Elsa (2021) and the 7.2 magnitude earthquake in Haiti (2021), and the on-going COVID-19 pandemic (since 2020), among others.

We further note that Small Island Developing States face specific challenges, as well as societal hazards such as crime, violence, migration and forced displacement, which require a concerted integration of disaster risk reduction into multisectoral development and recovery planning of the education sector.

We reaffirm the recommendations of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, the Worldwide Initiative on Safe Schools (2013), the Caribbean Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Strategy and Programing Framework 2014-2024, the Samoa Pathway (2014), the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change (2015), the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework to be adopted at COP 15 in 2022, and other relevant declarations.

We embrace the Comprehensive School Safety Framework and the Caribbean Model Safe School Programme as internationally recognized approaches to reducing the risk of various hazards in the education sector.

We further note the progress made by Caribbean countries to incorporate disaster risk reduction and resilience in education in the curriculum at all levels (curriculum and extra curriculum), the systematic training of teachers, students and families, as well as in the development of national school safety policies, standard operational procedures, school emergency plans and contingency plans, which highlight the development of appropriate teaching skills and materials, and identification of goals and specific objectives for reducing disaster risks at the school.

We underscore the importance of embracing harmonized approaches that strengthen disaster risk reduction in the education sector by using coherent methodologies and tools that are adapted to the Caribbean context.

We acknowledge the need to enhance risk governance through a truly multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder engagement at regional, national and local / municipal, community and school levels.
We emphasize the need to implement policies which ensure existing and new educational infrastructure and school facilities that are:

1. Fully accessible to all, particularly persons with disabilities;
2. Built resilient and sustainable, including assessing and retrofitting of actual infrastructures, and the promotion of nature-based solutions that aim at disaster and climate resilience;
3. Designed, constructed, retrofitted, and maintained to conform with national, regional, and international risk management guidelines, standards and building codes, ensuring a multi-hazard approach;
4. Supported by multi-sectoral cooperation and action, to ensure continuity of services, connectivity, water and sanitation, and energy access, among others;
5. Upgraded using school safety strategies.

We recognize that the Youth Forum is an integral part of the CSSI and acknowledge the important role of youth as agents of change and the contribution of future generations in the face of current challenges, which include reducing disaster risk, ensuring climate action, and promoting resilience.

We acknowledge the need to provide adequate follow-up to track and measure progress on the implementation of the points identified in the Road Map on School Safety, including the role of the CDM Education Sector Subcommittee.

We acknowledge that disasters have become a major cause of displacement, requiring concerted action at the school level to address disaster displacement risks and impacts, including additional pressures on host countries and their communities.

Based on the foregoing, we, the Caribbean Ministers of Education, High-level Officials, jointly with youth and Stakeholders with interest in the Education Sector, commit to:

1. Engage in the multi-stakeholder “Caribbean Safe School Initiative” for public and private facilities at all levels.
2. Build resilience in the education sector in collaboration with other sectors and stakeholders.
3. Source financial and other resources from the national, regional, and international community, through public and private sectors, to be channeled towards strengthening efforts in DRR linked to the education sector.
4. Coordinate with national and regional disaster management bodies to integrate the tenets of Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) into education policies and plans, and to ensure alignment with existing local, national and regional disaster risk reduction, biodiversity disruption and climate change resilience-building strategies.
5. Strengthen the coordination and cooperation mechanisms among stakeholders at the school, community, national, regional and international levels.
6. Build stronger collaboration among the Ministries of Education in the Caribbean with relevant Ministries of other sectors, including National Disaster Risk Management Offices, sectoral...
ministries, private sector entities, non-governmental organizations, as well as other regional and international entities.

9. Define and establish a framework to track and measure progress on the implementation of the actions identified in the Road Map on School Safety, to be authorized by the Ministers of Education.

We express our appreciation to the Government of Sint Maarten, in particular to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, as well as Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) Coordinating Unit, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), European Commission’s Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), for organizing this Forum and urge them to make every effort to disseminate and support this Declaration and Regional Road Map on School Safety in the Caribbean region.

We approve this Declaration and Road Map on School Safety, committing ourselves to its agreements, on the 30th of June 2022, in Sint Maarten.

Approved and signed by:

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