**United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**

Dominican Republic

                The Dominican Republic lies on the eastern side of the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean Sea.      Like many Central American nations, it enjoys a hot and tropical climate year-round, as well as natural resources such as gold and silver, and highly arable land.  However, the Dominican’s location also causes it to be in danger of a multitude of natural disasters, including hurricanes, floods and droughts.  These can be highly damaging for the country, as a large portion of its jobs and economy are traditionally based in the agriculture and tourism sectors.  Luckily, over the past couple of decades the nation’s reliance on agriculture has been decreasing, and the percentage of GDP from the services industry has been on the rise.  This shift is a good sign of increasing development within the Dominican Republic, and is largely due to an increase in political stability and educational programming.  Overall, there are currently approximately 10 million people living within the nation’s borders.  This population is generally quite young, and with a population growth rate of 1.21%, it is likely to remain young in the foreseeable future.  However, despite its youth, the disparity between the rich and poor in the Dominican is very apparent.  This may be due to its colonial history and the political unrest following its independence in 1844, and is currently one of the largest issues facing the nation today.  The Dominican Republic has participated in UNESCO actions before, and is excited to do so once again at the 2016 conference.

                Topic 1, Governance and its Effects on Education, is a very relevant topic for the Dominican Republic.  The country has long suffered from poor governance, due to both political inability and corruption.  Fortunately, the political situation in the Dominican has stabilized over recent years.  A system of peaceful democratic elections has been in place since 1996, and is proving very successful.  The current President, Danilo Medina Sanchez, was re-elected for his second term earlier in 2016.  Corruption, on the other hand, is still a very large issue for the nation’s government.  In Transparency International’s most recent Corruption Perceptions Index, the Dominican is ranked 103rd out of 168 nations, with a score of 33.  Budgetary leaks and bribery are alarmingly common, and there is weak rule of law throughout the nation.  However, the government recognizes the negative effect this corruption has on the nation, and has been working hard to improve governance in recent years.  For example, in 2010, the President held an Anti-Corruption Participatory Initiative (IPAC) which brought together members of the private sector, NGOs, the government, civil society and international development agencies in order to discuss methods of reducing corruption and increasing transparency.  By the end of the initiative, a set of 30 recommendations were implemented in order to improve accountability and transparency.  While the Dominican Republic still has lots of work ahead in regards to poor governance, it has taken good first steps in acknowledging the problem and looking for a solution.

                Topic 2, the Preservation of World Heritage Sites, is also of importance to the Dominican Republic, but is a lesser issue in comparison to other topics.  The Dominican Republic only has one UNESCO Heritage Site, despite having applied for many other designations.  This represents a common issue around the world, where developing countries are under-represented in the number of UNESCO sites compared to developed nations.  In a list of nations ranked highest to lowest in number of sites, none of the top 26 nations are located in Africa or Central America.  These regions could greatly benefit from having more UNESCO sites, seeing as their economies rely so heavily on tourism.  The one designation that the Dominican does have is the colonial city of Santo Domingo.  Founded in the 1400’s, it is the first permanent European establishment in the America’s and is home to the first cathedral, hospital and university in the New World.  Unfortunately, the city, now also the capitol of the Dominican Republic,   is at risk due to climate change.  In danger of saltwater erosion and rising sea levels, the World Bank projects it to be the fifth most effected city by climate change in the world.  Actions need to be taken quickly in order to preserve this important city and historic site for years to come.

Topic 3, Supporting and Accomplishing Education 2030, is considered an important topic for the Dominican Republic as well.  The Dominican realizes the importance of education in a nation's development, and is working to improve the accessibility of programs within its borders.  With a literacy rate of 91.8%, and a nearly non-existent gap between males and females, the country is faring better than many other island nations in the Caribbean.  Primary schooling is free and compulsory throughout the entire country, which gives young children a basic grounding in reading and writing.  However, large numbers of students do not continue to study at the secondary level.  This issue must be addressed in order for the Dominican to have a population of knowledgeable citizens who are qualified to work at high-paying jobs.  In addition, efforts must be made to provide children in the more secluded interior mountains with education, as they often do not have the same access as students in the more populated regions along the coast.

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