



Cluster Office
for the Caribbean



UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean
United Nations House, 3rd Floor
14-20 Port Royal Street, Kingston, Jamaica
Tel.: +1 876 630-5304
Email: kingston@unesco.org
Website: en.unesco.org/fieldoffice/kingston

Resilience Way, Lower Estate, St. Michael, Barbados, BB11000

Tel: (246) 434-4880 Fax: (246) 271-3660

Email: cdema@cdema.org

Visit our websites: www.cdema.org, www.weready.org

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Building Disaster Resilience in the Caribbean's Culture Sector

Bridgetown, Barbados March 20, 2020 – The significance of culture in the lives of communities and individuals serves as an anchor for identity and belonging. In times of climate disasters and their devastating impact for Caribbean Small Island Developing States, such as Irma, Maria, and Dorian, cultural heritage is at risk, and thus the loss of identities for whole societies and nations.

Recognizing the value and importance of safeguarding cultural heritage in the Caribbean, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in partnership with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) hosted a workshop on 'Disaster Resilience in the Caribbean's Culture Sector' from 11th-12th March 2020 in Bridgetown, Barbados.

The workshop brought together participants from the cultural sector among the Caribbean Small Island Developing States as well as national disaster management agencies, humanitarian actors and development partners to discuss disaster resilience in the Culture Sector, as well as identify opportunities for collaboration between cultural and disaster management practitioners.

Dr. Hilary Brown, Programme Manager, Culture and Community Development at the CARICOM Secretariat announced CARICOM's full support of this initiative and that he is "confident that the knowledge and skills to be gained at this workshop, will result in a better understanding of ways to prevent, mitigate and recover cultural assets and strengthened partnerships for a common and effective strategy for disaster resilience in the Caribbean's culture sector".

Highlighted during the workshop was the need to build awareness and foster synergies between policies and practices for the protection of culture from the effects of disasters through capacity building, awareness raising and advocacy. Guidelines towards the development of a strategy and plan of action for Disaster Resilience and Recovery in the Caribbean Culture Sector were also identified.

In her opening speech, Ms. Tatiana Villegas, Coordinator of the Cultural Programme, UNESCO Regional Office for Culture for Latin America and the Caribbean stressed the importance of safeguarding culture as "Culture is more than monuments and books – culture is who we are and the



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loss of culture equally results in a loss of identity, and thus affects the way in which people relate to the world.”

“As a corollary, culture is an enabler for resilience, a weapon in the recovery arsenal. CDEMA is committed to working with our Culture sector partners in moving this agenda forward”, said Deputy Executive Director at CDEMA, Ms. Elizabeth Riley.

Mr Didier Trebucq, United Nations Resident Coordinator for Barbados and the OECS in his remarks also said “While loss of human life is paramount in natural disasters, the loss of a nation’s culture and cultural artefacts can also be devastating. Culture as you know, connects persons to their past and can be a powerful tool in strengthening resilience, generally, while supporting sustainable recovery following the impact of disasters”.

Many participants echoed sentiments that the workshop was an excellent opportunity for national disaster management practitioners to collaborate with the culture sector in paving the way for disaster resilience in the cultural sector. Delegates were present from Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Aruba, Barbados, Belize, British Virgin Islands, Curaçao, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Sint Maarten, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands and the Netherlands Public Entities of Bonaire, Saba and Sint Eustatius.

Although the Caribbean culture sector emphasizes the deep links between its people and their natural and cultural environment, the integration of the culture sector into the disaster risk preparedness, response and management strategies and plans at the national and sub-regional levels is highly recommended.

The workshop is part of the UNESCO programme of ‘Culture in Emergencies’ that supports conventions, targeted actions and strategies to protect, prevent and restore cultural heritage in situations of crises such as armed conflicts and natural disasters.

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For further information, please contact:

Clive Murray
Communication and Education Specialist
CARIBBEAN DISASTER EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (CDEMA)
Resilience Way, Lower Estate
St. Michael, BARBADOS
Tel #: (246) 434-4880
Fax #: (246) 271-3660
Email: clive.murray@cdema.org

Catherina Schönhammer
Public Information
UNESCO Cluster Office for the Caribbean
United Nations House, 3rd Floor
14-20 Port Royal Street
Kingston, JAMAICA
Tel.: +1 876 630-5304
Email: c.schonhammer@unesco.org