



**REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SPORT AND YOUTH**

**Welcome remarks by the Minister of Education, Sport and Youth
Dr Athena Michaelidou
at the opening ceremony of MED9 High-Level Forum
and UNECE Forum on Education for Sustainable Development**

**Thursday, 27 June 2024, 09:30,
Parklane Hotel, Limassol**

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, Youngsters from all of the UNECE and Mediterranean Countries. KALOS ORISATE! (Welcome) to Cyprus.

It is a great pleasure and an honor for me to welcome you for a second time, since October 2022, in our island, when Cyprus hosted the UNECE 9th Ministerial Forum for Environment for Europe, during which the new implementation framework on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Strategy 2021-2030 as well as the Mediterranean Strategy on ESD 2030, were adapted by all UNECE Member States, as well as the participating Mediterranean Countries.

We are gathered here in the beautiful city of Limassol, Cyprus, a place that perfectly blends rich cultural heritage with natural beauty and serves as an inspiring background for our important discussions. Cyprus is proud to host for today and tomorrow two very important high-level events. The UNECE forum on ESD, with the theme “Empowering Youth for Sustainable Futures: Entrepreneurship Education and Youth Engagement” and the MED9 Ministerial Summit for the Education for Sustainable Development and Green Transition in the Mediterranean Region. Both high level events are highlighting our commitment to advancing sustainable development through education.

The UNECE forum on ESD organized by Cyprus in collaboration with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation, and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), provides a unique opportunity to explore the crucial role of education in

equipping our youth with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to address the complex challenges of our time. Our theme, "Empowering Youth for a Sustainable Future: Entrepreneurship Education and Youth Engagement", underscores the importance of fostering innovative and entrepreneurial mindsets among young people, enabling them to become proactive agents of change.

Similarly, the MED9 Ministerial Summit for the Education for Sustainable Development and Green Transition in the Mediterranean Region aims, through the Mediterranean Strategy on ESD, deriving from the UNECE ESD Strategy, to explore the pathways to establish education as the key driver for change.

Today, we stand at a critical juncture. The Mediterranean region, and indeed the world, face unprecedented environmental and socio-economic challenges. Climate change, resource depletion, loss of biodiversity and social inequalities demand urgent and collective action. Education for Sustainable Development is our most powerful tool to create resilient and sustainable societies. By integrating sustainability into education, we can inspire and empower the next generation to lead the way towards a healthier and more equitable world.

Our discussions over the next two days will focus on several key objectives:

Fostering Partnerships and Collaboration: Strengthening partnerships among countries, international organizations, development agencies, and other stakeholders is essential. Through collaboration, we can enhance the implementation of ESD and address our shared challenges more effectively.

Promoting Innovation and Entrepreneurship: By integrating ESD into entrepreneurship education, we aim to cultivate a generation of entrepreneurs who are not only driven by profit but also committed to creating innovative environmental, social, and economic impacts. This approach will help tackle youth unemployment and stimulate sustainable economic growth.

Developing a Comprehensive Roadmap: We will discuss and develop a comprehensive roadmap for integrating ESD into national educational frameworks. This roadmap will focus on actionable steps to maximize the impact and effectiveness of our initiatives, ensuring that our efforts lead to tangible and positive outcomes.

The UNECE Strategy for ESD and its new implementation framework for 2021-2030 represent pivotal steps towards the holistic integration of ESD across all educational levels and societal sectors. This forward-looking framework serves as a catalyst for

developing agile yet robust policies that address the multifaceted challenges posed by today's complex global environment.

In Cyprus, we have long recognized the transformative power of education. Our commitment to ESD is deeply rooted in the belief that education is the cornerstone of sustainable development and should be set at the center of learning. In this context, we have developed, amongst others, a national action plan for greening education, incorporating Sustainable Development Goals into the core curriculum. At the same time, we have prioritized teachers' professional development and the improvement of infrastructures at schools by rendering the school buildings more energy-efficient and by creating green spaces in schools, introducing waste reduction programs and water conservation measures.

Distinguished guests, dear participants,

The significance of both high-level events extends beyond our immediate discussions. It serves as a platform for building lasting relationships and fostering a spirit of cooperation among our countries. By sharing best practices, reflecting on achievements, and learning from one another, we can strengthen our collective efforts and inspire further innovation.

The role of our youth cannot be overstated. They are the leaders of tomorrow and the changemakers of today. By empowering them through ESD, we enable them to become proactive agents of change, fostering innovation and entrepreneurship that align with sustainable practices. This empowerment is essential for achieving the sustainable development goals and ensuring a resilient future for our region and beyond.

I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to all participants. Your presence here today is a testament to your dedication to the cause of sustainable development and education. I am confident that our discussions will be fruitful and that we will leave this event with renewed energy and a clear vision for the future.

In closing, I would like to highlight the unique opportunity we have here in Cyprus to blend our rich cultural heritage with modern sustainability practices. As you engage in the sessions and discussions over the coming days, I encourage you to also take a moment to appreciate the beauty and history of our island. Cyprus is not just a meeting place for this forum; it is a living example of the potential for harmonizing tradition with innovation and sustainability.

Thank you once again for being here. Together, we can make significant strides towards a sustainable future by empowering our youth and fostering a spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship. Let us embark on this journey with determination and hope, knowing that the work we do here today will have a lasting impact on future generations.

Thank you.





