



**OVERSEAS COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES
YOUTH NETWORK**

Declaration of the OCT Youth Network at the EU-OCT Forum in Brussels, 29 February 2024

Dear OCT and EU Representatives,

We, the representatives of the 2nd cohort of the Overseas Countries and Territories Youth Network (OCT-YN), would like to reaffirm our commitment to increasing the participation of young people and to presenting our unique youth perspectives. Before delving into our dedication towards sustainable community development in our islands, let us underscore the significance of the OCT-YN, serving as a crucial platform for fostering cooperation and dialogue among decision-makers, key stakeholders, and the youth. Through this declaration, we would like to affirm our shared commitment to tackling challenges deeply rooted in our diverse identities.

Collectively, we form a vibrant melting pot of societies, each possessing its own language, history, traditions, cuisine, music, arts and crafts, and more. Despite these differences, a common ground unites us, bridging the gap between our distinct cultures. This commonality lies in our shared commitment to improving our respective countries, which brought us together in this OCT Youth Network. The 13 OCTs span the globe, from the Caribbean to the Pacific, from the Arctic to the Antarctic. However, there is a lack of awareness and understanding of our cultures that persists globally, regionally and also within Europe. Again, we must emphasize the importance of our commitment to preserving our unique cultures. By boosting intercultural dialogue, we may achieve great outcomes, such as enhancing cultural tourism and strengthening our cultural identities.

Our regions and territories are characterized by unique cultural and natural elements. The Caribbean boasts beautiful beaches inviting tourism, the Pacific is renowned for its reefs and fishery, and the Arctic and Antarctic regions harbor many protected unique species. This special linkage to the oceans is anchored in our cultural identities, and therefore threats to the environment endangers our cultures and cultural identities in their own essence. It is crucial that we work together to find sustainable solutions to protect what makes up our unique cultural identities. We shall always remember that cultures cannot be “standardised.” They are unique and different, and this is what gives them their added value. We must not fear this diversity but rather respect it and celebrate it. It looks like a puzzle: none of the pieces are the same, but similarities connect each piece to the others.

Education also plays a pivotal role in preserving and promoting culture and heritage. To amplify

cultural awareness, we propose to create opportunities for young people, youth organisations and cultural sector workers to engage in cross-OCT intercultural exchanges. This could involve volunteering or job-shadowing programmes across the OCTs aimed at fostering more connectivity amongst our young people. Additionally, we must recognize the need to incorporate local culture as a curriculum in our schools, with a focus on our respective unique languages, local histories, and traditions.

Through the activities of the OCT Youth Network, we have learnt that each of our islands and territories possesses an element of our culture and heritage that connects to one another. By actively seeking this connection, we can consolidate our links and eventually unite.

In this way, our communities, our islands, propelled by the commitment of the young generations, will move forward in unity and diversity.

In this way,

- E hoben nan di Aruba, Korsow, Bonairu, lo por avanza.
- Kalaallit Nunaata inuusuttai ineriartussapput.
- La jeunesse de Nouvelle Calédonie, Saint-Barthélemy, Saint Pierre-et-Miquelon, de Polynésie Française, des Terres Australes et Antarctiques Françaises et de Wallis et Futuna progressera.
- The youth of Saba, Sint Eustatius and Sint Maarten will progress.

Thank you!

Sincerely,

The Overseas Countries and Territories Youth Network 2023 – 2024, February 2024