



PRESS RELEASE

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## Aruba Designated as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

**5 June 2026** - The 38th session of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) International Coordinating Council, held in Hernandarias, Paraguay, has officially approved today the designation of the Aruba Biosphere Reserve, recognizing the entire island as part of UNESCO's World Network of Biosphere Reserves.

The reserve encompasses the whole island, covering approximately 19,300 hectares and incorporating an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of nearly 3 million hectares. Aruba's Biosphere Reserve is home to approximately 108,000 inhabitants.

This landmark achievement is the result of a strong and inclusive co-construction process involving governmental institutions, local communities, civil society, scientists, and private sector stakeholders, with technical assistance provided by the UNESCO Regional Office for the Caribbean.

"The concept of biosphere reserves is particularly well suited to the realities of the Caribbean and of Small Island Developing States," said Eric Falt, Regional Director of UNESCO for the Caribbean. "These territories demonstrate how biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage, and sustainable development can go hand in hand. We hope Aruba's designation will inspire other countries in the region to consider this model and join the World Network of Biosphere Reserves."

Prior to Aruba's designation, the English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean region counted only two biosphere reserves: the Saint Mary's Biosphere Reserve in Saint Kitts and Nevis and the North-East Tobago Biosphere Reserve in Trinidad and Tobago. Aruba now strengthens the Caribbean presence within this global network and reinforces the region's role in advancing innovative approaches to sustainability.

Though modest in size, Aruba is a land of extraordinary contrasts and remarkable natural wealth. Its semi-arid landscapes, which may appear harsh at first glance, reveal an exceptional living heritage. Towering cacti, unique desert adapted plants, and rare bird species demonstrate that life flourishes even in the most unexpected environments.

Along the island's coastline, mangroves and seagrass beds provide essential nurseries for marine life, while coral reefs thrive beneath the Caribbean waters. Together, these ecosystems not only shelter rare and endemic species, but also sustain livelihoods, strengthen resilience against storms, and preserve Aruba's rich natural and cultural heritage.

Looking ahead, the establishment of the Aruba Biosphere Reserve positions the island as a leader in sustainable development across the Caribbean region. It opens the door to strengthened regional

cooperation with Saint Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, as well as other biosphere reserves in the Caribbean Basin --including Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

The designation will enable Aruba to share lessons learned while benefiting from the experiences, innovations, and scientific expertise of biosphere reserves worldwide. It also sends a powerful message to neighboring islands that sustainability is not a distant vision, but a practical and achievable reality.

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves are internationally recognized as “learning places for sustainable development” at local, national, regional, and global levels. They serve as sites for testing interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and managing the interactions between social and ecological systems, including biodiversity conservation, cultural diversity, and sustainable resource management.

These territories provide local solutions to global challenges by promoting approaches that reconcile nature conservation with sustainable development.

At the opening of the 38th session of the MAB International Coordinating Council, the World Network of Biosphere Reserves included 784 sites in 142 countries. During this year’s session, the Council is examining a new series of nominations and extensions from around the world, including Aruba, reflecting the growing international momentum toward sustainability, climate resilience, and biodiversity conservation.

The designation of Aruba as a Biosphere Reserve marks a historic milestone for the island, the Caribbean region, and the global movement toward a more sustainable and resilient future.

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