

Statement by Mr. Koichiro Matsuura Director General of the United Nations Education Science and Culture Organization  
UNESCO on the occasion of the Sixth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union. ...

*Khartoum 23 January. 2006*

by Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, Director General of the United Nations  
Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO)

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of the African Union

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Mr. Chairman of the Sixth Ordinary Session of the  
Assembly of the African Union,

Excellencies Heads of State and Government,

Mr. Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union,

Honourable Ministers,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

May I first of all congratulate you Mr. Chairman, on your brilliant election to the Chairmanship of this Sixth Session of the Assembly and thank you for the warm welcome accorded to the delegation of UNESCO and myself.

I wish also to respectfully greet all of you, particularly, the newly elected Heads of State and Government and the more especially to Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, President of Liberia and through her to all the African women.

May I also express all my gratitude for your decision to propose my candidature for a second term at the helm of UNESCO and for the unanimous support I got at the elections for this post. I am honoured by your trust and I am more convinced, if necessary, about the specific responsibilities that UNESCO has towards Africa.

My joy is all the more greater that we are in the Sudan, the biggest country of Africa, heir of one of the first civilizations of mankind, nurtured and inspired by the majestic White and Blue Nile.

Mr. Chairman,

In the statement which I had the honour to make in front of you, at your Assembly of July 2004 in Addis Ababa, I would like to inform you about the most striking landmarks of our cooperation with Africa.

This cooperation, which for a long time was of a bilateral nature, today has an increasingly marked regional and sub-regional dimension, geared resolutely towards integration and the parities of NEPAD. The consultative mechanisms which I established in this regard, including the UNESCO Committee for NEPAD and the Forum for Regional and Sub-Regional Organizations, for the support to the UNESCO/NEPAD

cooperation, bring about precious consensus through the relevance and the constructive force of their recommendations.

Our action in this field depends fully on the privileged partnership with the Commission of the African Union. The terms of this partnership will furthermore be updated with the cooperation agreement which I have just signed concurrently with this session of the Assembly with my friend Chairperson Konare. This agreement will replace the one which linked UNESCO and the OAU since 1968 and will give a regional perspective to the specific agreements already binding our Organization particularly, to ECOWAS, SADC, CEMAC, CEN-SAD and the COMESA and to which soon will be added to other agreements respectively with IGAD and ECCAS.

Our partnership with the African Academy of Languages, the support we have given to the process for the establishment of the International Centre for the Education of the Girls and Women of Africa (CIEFFA) of Ouagadougou to which the UNESCO General Conference has just granted the status of a Centre of Category 11, as well as enhanced technical assistance that we have given to Human Resources, Science and Technology Department of the African Union, are a few concrete examples of efforts made by our two Organizations to make our cooperation more effective.

UNESCO expresses satisfaction at the fact that the structure of the Commission of the African Union has taken into account the issues linked to the development of science and technology and social affairs. We hope that you will give the same attention to the recommendation of the Conference of Ministers of Culture of December 2005 related to the establishment of an organ specifically in-charge of cultural affairs, given the crucial importance of culture in any development process.

**Mr. Chairman,**

This session of the Assembly will definitely be considered as one of the most probing results of the challenge thrown by the international community at the Jomtien Conference in Thailand in 1990 and reiterated at the Dakar Forum in 2000 in order to respond effectively to the fundamental educational needs of all children, youth and adults. This solidarity movement in favour of the right to education is today witnessing a new dynamism of which this Summit is one of the most enlightening evidence.

I am fully aware of the complex nature of the educational problems. Nevertheless, my deep conviction is that it is possible to win the challenge of education in Africa. To do so, it is necessary, not only to work out educational policies adapted to the situation the specific needs of each country but also they be supported by an unflinching political will and a priority mobilization of available resources. The number of African children who do not have access to the first year of schooling decreased from 25% in 1990 to about 10% today. Nevertheless, the rate of school drop-outs still remains high and only 59% of children conclude their primary education. With renewed efforts and a sustained political will, coupled with actual international solidarity, African may move towards primary education for all in 2015, as recommended by Objective NO.2 of the Millennium.

As regards equality, in spite of the speedy progress of girls in the first half of this decade, efforts are still to be made to eliminate disparities between sexes in the primary and secondary education. Indeed, in 2005, Sub-Saharan Africa had 23 million no-school going girls, that is the highest number in the world.

There is no doubt today that the world process aimed at enhancing mobilization in favour of education for all, even it has not yet produced results commensurate with the huge requirements of Africa, has had the merit of placing education at the heart of the development problem. Placed in all its relations and dimensions with other areas such as culture, health, labour, protection of the environment, economic growth, democracy and peace, education is today recognized as the indispensable basis of economic and social development. The educational component has furthermore become today one of the major axis of the regional integration process in Africa. The acknowledgement given to it by this session of the highest leaders of the Continent should convince the last of the sceptics.

The growing attention and interests which the African Sub-Regional political, economic or monetary organizations give to education constitute another evidence and a cause for encouragement to pursue our efforts.

This is why I believe that the decision taken by the Ministers of Education in Algiers in April 2005, to launch a Second Decade of Education in Africa will make it possible to strengthen and expand the efforts for mobilization particularly for the social actors. UNESCO is ready to support the Plan of Action of the Second Decade of Education which opens new prospects for a quality education, education of girls, the teaching of science and technology and the use of new information and technologies.

The evaluation of the First Decade of Education in Africa stressed the need to increase coordination between the partners of education in Africa to better target the common objectives of education for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. It is in awareness of the imperative need to pool our efforts in order to maximize the impact which I proposed to the Ministers of Education meeting in Algiers to reflect on the possibilities of merging MINEDAF and COMEDAF.

The actual exercise of the right to quality education faces indeed political and social problems such as the armed conflicts, natural disasters, pandemics like malaria or HIV and AIDS, the problem of refugees, displaced persons and migrants whose acuteness diverts unfortunately and very often the necessary political and budgetary efforts for the educational needs. This state of affairs should not have dissuaded the Parliamentarians, the public authorities and the local communities from encouraging the financing of education in the national budgets. This also demands that the international level, no stone be left unturned to fulfil the promise made by the donors to support the countries which have made "serious commitment and submitted a credible plan of education for all".

The mobilization of external resources for education must therefore be pursued relentlessly. In this regard, I wish to commend the initiative of the accelerated implementation of Education for All piloted by the World Bank with participation of UNESCO and the commitments made in Gleneagles to increase development

assistance to reach gradually 50 additional billion dollars per year in 2010, half of which is devoted to Africa. I wish that a major part of these resources be devoted to education and that all the innovative mechanisms which can contribute to the increase in resources, whether it is the private sector or the debt swap with education already applied in some Latin American countries can be explored. Whatever be the case, I wish to assure you that UNESCO will take up its share for capacity building.

It is in this sense that I launched three initiatives to promote Education for All, particularly in Africa.

**Mr. Chairman,**

Thus, within the framework of the UN Decade for Literacy which would last up to 2012, UNESCO has taken three initiatives in Autumn of 2005; Initiative for Literacy: Knowledge for power (LIFE) which will benefit 28 out of 34 African countries concerned; Initiative of training teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa and EDUSIDA which is a world initiative for HIV and AIDS control carried out in partnership with UNAIDS.

The Khartoum Summit will also be seen as the crowning of the efforts made jointly by UNESCO and the African Organs over the past 4 decades to conceptualise and to operationalise the cultural dimension of development. Chairperson Konare said in May 2005 at the UNESCO Headquarters in a speech of high intellectual and political scope and I quote "the cultural struggle is also a political project aimed at giving social substance to the Union, to build a holistic influence around Africa".

UNESCO, the house of all cultures, which has always supported African intellectuals in their demands and identity quests, especially within the framework of the negritude and panafricanism movements, can but support the African Union in this contract.

This commitment of UNESCO vis-a-vis Africa was given concrete expression way back in 1966 on the occasion of the Universal Declaration on the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation, and in 1975, with the AFRICACULT historic conference which paved the way for the adoption of the first Cultural Charter of the Continent.

More recently, this commitment culminated in the elaboration of the General History of Africa, work of memory and appropriation of fundamental historic heritage of the world cultures and civilizations. It also culminated in the draft "Slavery Route", also a work of memory and of forgiveness and reunion between Africa and its Diaspora on the one hand, and between this continent and the rest of the world.

Within the context of its mission as a brainstorming and intellectual cooperation body, UNESCO helped to build key concepts, the African appropriation of which generated such projects and programmes as the African Cultural Common Market, whose objective is to promote regional integration through free movement of persons, services and cultural goods.

Similarly, "peace culture" as a means of structural prevention of conflict was widely espoused in Africa, no doubt because of the serious threats the recurrence of conflicts poses to collective peace and security.

Mr. Chairman,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sub-Saharan Africa has just hosted for the first time a meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Durban, South Africa. The said meeting adopted a plan of action and decided to establish an African world Heritage Fund. In keeping with the resolution of the 33rd Session of the UNESCO General Conference, I would like from this podium to make an appeal for inter-African solidarity in order to mobilize from the public and private sectors, and from all people of good will, the necessary funds for the launching of the activities aimed at the increase in the number of African sites featuring on the World Heritage List and at the reduction of their number on the List of Endangered Sites, where it currently accounts for 40% of the sites listed.

Furthermore, the adoption by UNESCO of the Convention for the Safeguard of Intangible Cultural Heritage was aimed at giving this intangible heritage which underpins the cultural heritage of mankind, all the necessary consideration. I am greatly pleased to announce its impending entry into force on 20 April as I received the thirtieth instrument of ratification on 20 January, and I am gratified that nine African countries feature among this first thirty States. This massive ratification is no surprise for a Continent whose richness in terms of intangible and vast heritage and which hitherto had not benefited from any protection. The First Assembly of the States Parties will meet in Paris from 27 to 29 June 2006. All the States, many of which I hope will be African, which will have deposited their instruments of ratification with UNESCO before 30 March, will be invited to participate in the said meeting.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At this juncture, I can assure you that UNESCO will accord the greatest attention to the Nairobi Declaration as well as to all the texts adopted by the Ministers of Culture, notably the New African Cultural Charter, because as far as UNESCO is concerned, education and culture are inextricably linked. This is no doubt also the case in Africa, as in his contribution to the General History of Africa, Amadou Hampate Ba, quoting an African proverb wrote and I quote: "the blacksmith forges words, the weaver weaves it and the cobbler polishes it by currying it".

In Africa, the cradle of civilization and oral tradition, word is the most appropriate and effective way of transmitting knowledge about nature, about society and about intangible rapport. It is through word therefore, and through all those who master it, that education is structured and culture conveyed to become an inexhaustible source of knowledge.

In this connection, like African tradition, I am convinced that it is necessary to place emphasis on the inter-relationship between education and culture, and to develop a holistic inter-disciplinary approach for reproduction of and access to knowledge. This approach will make it possible to re-think formal education and the curricula in their

socio-cultural context in order to make them more relevant and less abstract in relation to life and social expectations. Such an approach will place culture as a source of nourishment, the alpha and omega of education.

The revision of school programmes will in this regard be an important factor in the training of African youths. It will contribute most certainly to the training of citizens open to modernity and to the world, and mutually benefiting from the input of their specific genius.

African languages, living heritages, parameters and vehicles of identity, are also essential elements of this interface between culture and education. Their teaching and utilization in the media, public life and cyberspace, will constitute one of the major challenges to be addressed.

**Mr. Chairman,**

UNESCO has demonstrated its commitment vis-a-vis Africa by creating within the Organization a department that deals specifically with African issues, by working closely with the African Union and NEPAD, as well as with the Regional and Sub-Regional Communities. You can regard UNESCO as your sincere partner in your efforts to place education and culture at the service of the Continent's development.

We believe that literacy, the training of teachers, the teaching of science and the prevention of HIV/AIDS are priority areas for successful implementation of the formal and informal learning process. Our role as a partner is to support you in the elaboration of your national plans in the fields of education, science and culture.

This is why I continue to do my utmost to strengthen the capacities of UNESCO Offices in Africa, particularly the capacities of multi-country offices. I hope that our close partnership with the African Union and its Member States will generate a renewed force for Africa's development.

**Mr. Chairman,**

I would like to conclude by borrowing from African wisdom, which right from the beginning, has made the interface between culture, education and training a reality, by quoting a Swahili saying to mark the celebration of the year 2006 as the International Year of African Languages.

MTU BILA MILA NI KAMA MTUMWA, which means: "a man deprived of culture is a slave".

Let us all therefore commit ourselves to make education and culture the lever of development.

I thank you for your kind attention.