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Address by
Mr Koichiro Matsuura

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the inaugural ceremony of the Fifth Meeting
of the High-Level Group on Education for All (EFA)

Beijing, China, 28 November 2005

Mr Prime Minister,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to the fifth meeting of the High-Level Group on Education for All (EFA). I am particularly delighted that we are meeting in Beijing.

I would like to express my heartfelt thanks to our Chinese hosts for their warm welcome and their excellent cooperation in organizing this event. My deep appreciation goes to the Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China, Mr Wen Jiabao, for being here to open this meeting and for his stimulating opening address. It was most encouraging to learn of his government's firm determination to vigorously pursue all six EFA goals and also to help other developing countries in their efforts to achieve those goals.

Furthermore, my special thanks go to my co-chairman of this event, the Minister of Education, Mr Zhou Ji, with whom it has been a pleasure to collaborate.

We are greatly honoured by the presence here today of the President of Mongolia, Mr Nambaryn Enkhbaya; HRH Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of Thailand; and the Vice-President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr Arthur Zahidi N'Goma. I look forward very much to their remarks on this auspicious occasion.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet at a highly significant time. I would like to suggest three main reasons why this is so.

First, this year has seen a series of international events which will have an impact on our work. The G8 countries, meeting at Gleneagles, UK, in July, promised increases in development assistance that would reach an additional US\$ 50 billion annually by 2010. This will be the largest increase in aid since the 1960s.

As key members of the global EFA movement, these decisions leave us with a dual responsibility: on the one hand, we must watch carefully to see that promises become reality, and, on the other hand, we must work hard and consistently to ensure that significant new and additional resources are made available to the education sector as a whole and basic education in particular. Our deliberations this week must give real impetus to the discharge of these responsibilities.

In September this year, the world's leaders met in New York to review progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and other development targets. The resulting outcome gave a special place to EFA, locating it squarely within the context of the role of education in addressing wider development agendas. For the first time, world leaders collectively reaffirmed the Dakar Framework for Action and, I am naturally pleased to note, recognized UNESCO's role in promoting EFA as a tool of poverty eradication.

In October, over 100 ministers of education, including many participants present here today, took part in the Ministerial Round Table on EFA during UNESCO's General Conference, whose overarching theme was EFA. The Round Table's Communiqué provides a strong platform for our discussions this week, especially the sense of mutuality in matching policy commitments in developing countries with funding commitments on the part of donor countries. We need to make further progress in this direction in the days ahead.

The second reason why this is a watershed year is because it is now five years since we adopted the six EFA goals in Dakar. We can celebrate some significant progress. As the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006* makes clear, more girls are in school than ever before, with striking improvements in some of the most difficult situations, such as low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia. National spending on basic education as well as external aid to EFA have risen. Overall, 20 million new students are in school in each of the regions I have just mentioned.

My third point focuses on the huge challenges that remain. We are now one-third of the way through our journey to 2015 – we have ten years left. It is clear from this year's *Global Monitoring Report* that we are not doing well in addressing the literacy needs of adults. It is intolerable that 18% per cent of the world's adults have no access to written communication and are therefore excluded from active participation in important aspects of their societies. It is also clear that the quality of basic education remains low and will not lead to meaningful learning outcomes unless tackled with renewed vigour.

Above all, in this year of 2005, we are acutely conscious that we have collectively missed the gender parity target in primary and secondary schooling. In fact, unless current trends improve, the target may not even be achieved by 2015 in as many as 86 countries! This is a wake-up call to all of us and must concentrate our minds, not only here but in our daily work in education as we set priorities and allocate resources.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Against the backdrop of these significant events and factors, we will focus our discussion on a number of central issues. Building on the data and analysis of the most recent *Global Monitoring Report*, we will consider ways forward in addressing literacy needs and in repositioning ourselves to achieve the gender parity goal. As far as literacy is concerned, I have repeatedly called upon EFA partners and governments to devote greater efforts to reaching the EFA goal for literacy, and I issue that call again here.

Among the groups which are marginalized from mainstream efforts in EFA are those living in rural areas. Some rural populations are not well served by existing school systems; the answer is not more of the same – instead, we need to be innovative and change our approaches. Our deliberations must engender a far-reaching re-assessment of policies and strategies to reach the excluded, especially those in rural areas.

I am particularly looking forward to the input of the High-Level Group to the elaboration of the Joint Action Plan in EFA. By achieving common ownership of its principal lines of joint action, we will be able to offer better concrete support at national level to countries in implementing EFA.

We will spend time – very necessary time – looking at the mobilization of resources, particularly at the role of the EFA-Fast Track Initiative (FTI) which received specific mention in the outcome of the World Summit in September. As noted earlier, this year may prove to be a turning point in the provision of further resources for development. Generating additional resources for education, especially basic education, both nationally and internationally, and using those resources more effectively, harmonizing approaches and doing all this under clear and dynamic national leadership – these are some of the issues which we must address.

As we look forward to the next two years, UNESCO, in collaboration with its EFA partners and the Global Monitoring Report Team, will work towards the preparation of a comprehensive mid-term review of progress towards the EFA goals in 2007-2008. UNESCO is currently elaborating a working plan for coordinating the comprehensive mid-term review.

This meeting of the High-Level Group takes place, therefore, at a critical juncture. Our deliberations over the next two days, and the resulting communiqué, will shape other events in 2006: the African Union Summit in January, whose special theme is Education and Culture; the meeting of the Education Ministers of the E-9 group of high population countries in Mexico in February; the spring session of

UNESCO's Executive Board; and the spring meeting of the World Bank/IMF Development Committee.

In conclusion, let me repeat what I stressed earlier: we have ONLY ten years left until 2015 – let us together continue to strengthen political will and build momentum for EFA not only through gatherings such as those I have mentioned but also through other events where the EFA message needs to be heard. Let us build on the solid and steady achievements already visible and determine together that the challenge before us, while daunting, is not insurmountable. Let us never forget that the life chances of millions of adults and children depend, in significant measure, on our response.

Thank you.