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Address by  
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(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the first working session of the Fifth Meeting  
of the High-Level Group on Education for All (EFA)

Beijing, China, 28 November 2005

Mr Chairman,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the work of this fifth meeting of the High-Level Group on Education for All (EFA) gets underway this morning, let me once again welcome all of you to this important event in the EFA calendar. I would like to thank all of you for coming to Beijing for what promises to be a most interesting and useful meeting.

I would like to thank our Chinese hosts once again for their warm hospitality and cooperation. The arrangements are excellent and will greatly facilitate the conduct of our work. Let me therefore repeat my thanks to my co-chairman of this year's High-Level Group, the Chinese Minister of Education, Mr Zhou Ji.

My particular appreciation also goes to those who have agreed to serve as chairs, lead commentators and panelists. We are all looking forward to their high-quality interventions.

At the same time, I would like to stress that all participants will have opportunities in the different sessions to share their views and contribute to the debate. In this regard, I would like to make a special plea that we allow sufficient opportunity within the sessions for genuine exchange and open discussion. This will require that those acting as commentators and panelists stick to the time-limits for their presentations. The reward will be that they will receive more substantial feedback to their interventions.

This week, the High-Level Group once again is exercising its gravitational pull by attracting a series of events designed to maintain momentum in the pursuit of the EFA goals. The meetings of the UN Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) and of the Third Round Table on EFA and the Elimination of Child Labour, which have already taken place, certainly offer perspectives which will inform our deliberations. The meeting on the EFA-Fast Track Initiative, immediately following the High-Level Group, will carry forward our conclusions into practical steps to boost resource mobilization and the effective delivery of external assistance to countries that need it.

These meetings illustrate that the EFA movement is broad-based and diverse, and yet we are united behind the same agenda agreed in Dakar five years ago. It is important that, in addition to UNESCO, other major agencies such as UNICEF and the World Bank as well as donor countries and civil society organizations are very active in support of developing countries' EFA efforts.

This is the spirit in which UNESCO has launched three important new initiatives which address issues which have emerged as particularly tough challenges for EFA: adult literacy, teachers in sub-Saharan Africa, and HIV & AIDS and education:

- The Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) will give priority to stimulating greater adult literacy efforts in 34 countries where the literacy rate is less than 50% or where there are more than 10 million adults without access to literacy. Implementation is beginning in the first wave of 10 countries, and we warmly welcome further partnership and collaboration, which have been built into the initiative from the outset.
- The Teacher Training Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA) focuses on increasing the supply of teachers and raising the quality of teaching and learning through the enhancement of teacher competence. As access to schooling grows in this region, it is essential to address the quality of learning outcomes, and, as we are all aware, teachers are the lynchpin of such efforts.
- EDUCAIDS, the Global Initiative on HIV/AIDS and Education, will work within the broader international partnership of UNAIDS to ensure that educational approaches are optimized in HIV and AIDS prevention. In a year when a record 4.9 million people are estimated to have contracted the virus, and when all regions except the Caribbean saw increases in the number of people living with HIV, prevention efforts remain imperative alongside actions to expand access to treatment, care and support.

These initiatives are key to UNESCO's programmatic contribution to EFA. In addition, I should like to stress that UNESCO's reform of its Education Sector is very much attuned to the development of its EFA role. The Education Sector is now under the capable and dynamic leadership of Peter Smith, Assistant Director-General for Education. I am confident that his efforts will result in making UNESCO's Education Sector a yet more effective and efficient instrument of programmatic action and coordination in the area of EFA, which is UNESCO's priority of priorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude these preliminary remarks with the hope that, through our deliberations over the next two days and through the efforts of the Sherpas Group, we can generate a Communiqué that encapsulates both renewed resolve and practical measures to advance the cause of EFA.

Thank you.