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Organización
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the opening ceremony of the

2009 World Conference on Higher Education:

**“The New Dynamics of Higher Education and
Research for Societal Change and Development”**

UNESCO, 5 July 2009

Excellences, Mesdames et Messieurs,

C'est un grand honneur et un plaisir de vous souhaiter à
tous la bienvenue à la Conférence mondiale sur
l'enseignement supérieur.

Je suis particulièrement heureux de saluer la présence à
cette cérémonie d'ouverture de Monsieur Danilo Türk,
Président de la République de Slovénie, de Madame
Pearlette Louisy, Gouverneur général de Sainte-Lucie,
du Professeur Jill Biden, épouse du vice-président des
Etats-Unis d'Amérique, de Monsieur Nahas Angula,
Premier ministre de la Namibie, de Monsieur Angel
Gurría Secrétaire général de l'OCDE, et de Madame

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Commissaire européenne chargée des relations extérieures.

Cette Conférence mondiale réunit à l'UNESCO plus de sept cents participants représentant l'ensemble des parties prenantes, dont plus de soixante ministres de toutes les régions du monde.

Votre présence ici témoigne de l'importance stratégique que revêt l'enseignement supérieur et du rôle primordial qui lui revient dès lors qu'il s'agit de relever des défis d'ampleur planétaire et d'orienter le développement, tant au plan national que régional.

L'enseignement supérieur connaît aujourd'hui une véritable révolution, en raison de l'accroissement sans précédent du nombre d'étudiants, des multiples répercussions, qu'elles soient d'ordre économique ou culturel, de la mondialisation dans la vie des sociétés, et enfin des effets des technologies de la communication et de l'information sur l'enseignement et le partage des connaissances sous toutes leurs formes.

Cette révolution était déjà en marche lors de la première Conférence sur l'enseignement supérieur, convoquée par l'UNESCO en 1998. Celle-ci avait offert à des participants de tous horizons l'occasion de débattre sur

les politiques à suivre en la matière. Le paysage géopolitique dans lequel s'inscrivait ce débat connaissait alors de profondes mutations, avec la transition démocratique en Europe centrale et orientale et l'apparition d'économies émergentes, comme au Brésil, en Chine et en Inde.

La Déclaration adoptée à l'issue de la Conférence mondiale de 1998 portait essentiellement sur l'élargissement de l'accès à l'enseignement supérieur, sur la promotion de réformes visant à en améliorer la qualité, la pertinence et l'efficacité, ainsi que sur la nécessité d'en assurer le financement par des ressources appropriées.

Ces préoccupations sont plus que jamais à l'ordre du jour. L'UNESCO a coopéré étroitement avec ses Etats membres, ainsi qu'avec une large gamme de partenaires privés et publics, afin de mieux appréhender et gérer ce secteur de plus en plus complexe et compétitif.

Ensemble, nous avons réussi à étendre cette coopération dans les domaines de l'assurance qualité, de la recherche et du partage des connaissances, ainsi qu'à développer des compétences pour l'élaboration de politiques en matière d'enseignement supérieur et de recherche.

Aujourd'hui, nous avons l'occasion d'évaluer les progrès accomplis, mais aussi de mesurer les nouveaux enjeux de l'enseignement supérieur et leur incidence sur les politiques à mettre en œuvre.

Nombre de ces enjeux ont été identifiés et analysés lors des conférences préparatoires régionales qui se sont tenues à Cartagena de Indias, Macao, Dakar, New Delhi, Bucarest et au Caire. Je veux remercier tous ceux qui ont collaboré à l'organisation de ces réunions. Elles nous ont offert d'incalculables plateformes de dialogue, d'anticipation et de proposition. Elles ont mis en lumière les tensions, ouvert des perspectives et posé des questionnements d'ordre éthique. La Conférence qui s'ouvre aujourd'hui en représente l'aboutissement, et constituera une étape importante sur la voie d'un renforcement de la coopération internationale dans ce domaine.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The title of this World Conference, "The New Dynamics of Higher Education and Research for Societal Change and Development", reflects two beliefs.

First: that new forces are transforming higher education at a speed that could not have been foreseen ten years ago.

Second: that an ethical purpose underpins the mission of higher education. As such, certain values must guide the ways in which we grapple and respond to these forces.

Let me briefly outline four main dynamics and their implications. I shall then offer some reflections on higher education's role in today's world, and chart out key policy issues that will be the subject of debate over the next three days.

The first dynamic is the accelerating demand for higher education. Since 2000, an additional 51 million new students have enrolled in tertiary education worldwide. This is very good news, pointing to the expansion of secondary education and the perception that advanced degrees are essential for participating in our knowledge-driven societies. Furthermore, higher education must now be viewed from a lifelong perspective, as growing numbers of adults seek to enrol in courses to upgrade their skills and acquire new competences.

Stemming from this, the second dynamic is diversification because public funding alone cannot meet student

demand. Public expenditure per student is much higher in tertiary education than at primary and secondary levels. The imbalance is especially dramatic in developing countries. As a result, we are witnessing the emergence of more complex, competitive systems with a variety of institutions and providers.

Private higher education has been the fastest growing component, accounting for more than 30 percent of enrolments worldwide and up to 70 percent in some countries. The boundaries between public and private are blurred, with hybrid entities evolving and cross border operations developing rapidly.

A third key dynamic relates to the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on all aspects of learning, from delivering courses and knowledge sharing to collaboration on research projects and facilitating access to educational resources free of charge, as exemplified by the open resources community.

A fourth dynamic that closely relates to all the above is globalization. It is manifest in how we teach, learn, study, research and communicate. To cite just a few examples, globalization is reflected in the growing number of students studying outside of their home countries, in

universities establishing branch campuses and off-shore academic programmes, and partnering with universities in other countries to set up degree programmes.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the implications of these trends and some of the policy tensions and challenges they are creating in the fields of equity, quality and institutional cooperation.

First, the equity challenge. Despite the explosive growth in student numbers, mass higher education is far from being a reality. Tertiary enrolments remain relatively low across the developing world: 6 percent in Africa; 11 percent in South and West Asia; 23 percent in the Arab States; and 26 percent in East Asia and the Pacific. Despite improvements, women still face considerable barriers when pursuing higher education in Africa and South and West Asia.

OECD estimates that participation rates of 40 to 50 percent in higher education are considered vital to strong economic growth. Most regions are a long way from this, but trends show that enrolments will continue to increase. This poses considerable challenges in terms of providing enough places, ensuring that students are not

discriminated against on account of wealth, gender, ethnicity or other factors, and maintaining high quality standards.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that higher education “shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.” But as participants at all regional conferences have pointed out, not all social groups are benefiting from the expansion of higher education. Cost remains an enormous barrier to access.

Even in countries where enrolment is high, inequalities persist. Like at all levels of education, special measures are required to enable more disadvantaged students to participate in higher education. From Mexico and Brazil to Uganda and India, there is evidence of efforts to open higher learning to aspiring students from more marginalized groups. These efforts should be supported and scaled up.

The second challenge is to assure quality in today’s global and diversified context, where some 2.5 million students study outside their home country and cross-border provision is on the rise. Quality assurance has as much to do with protecting students from fraudulent providers as with recognizing qualifications across

borders and ensuring that students successfully graduate.

International cooperation in this field has been intense. The Bologna Process, a landmark in the past ten years, has led to the creation of a European area of higher education and research and a common degree structure. Similar areas are emerging in other regions.

UNESCO has established six regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications that have been ratified by over 100 member states. We are in the process of updating two of these Conventions – for the Africa and Asia-Pacific regions – to reflect the new dynamics I have just mentioned.

In 2002, UNESCO launched a Global Forum on International Quality Assurance, Accreditation and the Recognition of Qualifications. This has generated a number of partnerships.

With the OECD, it has led to the establishment of guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education; with the European Union and the Council of Europe to the creation of networks of information centres for the recognition of qualifications; with Hewlett Packard to a project on reversing brain drain; and with the World

Bank to a global initiative for building capacity in quality assurance in developing countries. We are also setting up an information portal on higher education institutions to help students make informed decisions and protect them from misleading information.

Another central aspect of quality assurance is the staffing of higher education institutions. Average qualifications for academics in many countries are declining; many universities employ part-time professors who have full time appointments in other institutions. Qualified academics in developing countries are attracted by higher salaries abroad, contributing to the “brain drain”.

Policies must be developed to provide adequate working conditions for academic staff, in line with the 1997 Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel. Trust in the value of higher education will be deeply eroded if institutions are unable to attract and retain qualified staff, and offer them adequate conditions to pursue teaching and research.

This leads to my third point – the importance of institutional cooperation and networking in research, knowledge creation and sharing. Higher education cannot prosper without the sharing of knowledge.

UNESCO Chairs and UNITWIN networks are instrumental in encouraging this process.

All our regional conferences have underlined the importance of regional areas for higher education and research inspired by the Bologna model, but responding to regional specificities. These knowledge hubs are emerging in all regions and have the potential to encourage mobility and communication among students, scholars and researchers. They also have the potential to reduce inequalities between countries, regions and groups by strengthening regional centres of excellence.

Such cooperation is likewise crucial for fostering a sense of shared social responsibility, a specific theme of this Conference.

As I stated above, higher education institutions play a strategic role in finding solutions to today's leading challenges in the fields of health, science, education, renewable energies, water management, food security and the environment.

The world needs the engagement of higher education institutions to achieve internationally-agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals

aimed at eradicating extreme poverty and the goals of Education for All.

We need higher education institutions to train teachers and planners, to conduct pedagogical research and develop relevant curricula that integrate the values of sustainable development.

Higher education offers diverse paths to learning, but all must be grounded in a sense of civic engagement and social responsibility.

Because we live in a globally interdependent world, part of our cooperation must aim to strengthen higher education systems in least developed regions. I am referring in particular to sub-Saharan Africa, a priority region in all UNESCO programmes.

Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced the highest average regional growth rate in tertiary education. It harbours enormous human potential, but faces deep challenges that are accentuated in the current economic context. The special roundtable on Africa will seek to propose strategies that promote regional centres of excellence in Africa and develop expertise in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is no question that governments face very tough policy choices. They are under enormous pressure in developing regions to expand all levels of the education system. They are now grappling with the financial and economic crisis that could lead to cuts in education and research budgets and put pressure on institutions to increase fees. This is the time to advocate for counter cyclical spending in education. Past financial crises have actually led to increased demand for tertiary education.

Speaking at Cairo University last month, US President Barack Obama defined education and innovation as the currency of the 21st century. Several governments in Asia have already expressed their determination to continue investing in research because they know it is a key to being competitive when the recovery sets in.

Participants in today's conference come from governments, higher education institutions, civil society groups, the private sector, and bilateral and multilateral agencies. We share a mutual interest in developing vibrant inclusive higher education systems. Such systems have the potential to promote peace, international understanding and cooperation. They are a key to nation-

building and to productive engagement in regional and global research arenas.

The role of international cooperation is imperative because no institution can function in isolation.

Governments must work with national objectives in mind, to ensure access on the basis of merit and to promote quality standards and stimulate innovation and research. But they must do so with a global outlook. It is through sharing ideas and knowledge that our societies will become more prosperous and sustainable.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The 1998 conference led to the establishment of two networks: the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and Knowledge, and the Global University Network for Innovation. Both have generated research and policy debate on issues related to globalization and higher education.

I am confident that this 2009 World Conference will lead to a dedicated and dynamic association of major partners and donors to guide and support the development of higher education, with particular attention to increasing opportunities and stimulating innovation in low-income countries.

We must be careful of ideological divides: of pitting public against private, national sovereignty against integration, globalization against cultural diversity. We are here to encourage innovative thinking in terms of complementarities and synergies. We must strike a balance between cooperation and competition with a view to promoting excellence for the largest numbers.

Throughout the ages, higher education institutions have stood as beacons of learning, intellectual debate, critical thinking and innovation. Those who were in high school when we held our last World Conference in 1998 have now reached university age. For them and for the next generations, we must ensure that higher education opens horizons and responds to individual and national aspirations. This Conference offers us a landmark opportunity to put into action our collective responsibility and ambition to make higher education in all regions a driver of development and international understanding in this second decade of the 21st century.

Thank you