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**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of the International
Seminar on Climate Change Education**

UNESCO, 27 July 2009

Honourable Ambassador of Denmark to UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to open this UNESCO
International Seminar on Climate Change Education.

First, let me express my gratitude to the Government of
Denmark for providing the financial support to organize
this important event.

I would also like to thank our participants, climate change
experts and educators, some of whom have travelled a
long way to be here today in Paris. We have with us
representatives of governments and civil society from all
regions, including many small islands developing states.
A very warm welcome to you all.

I am also pleased to see colleagues from other multilateral agencies. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has repeatedly stated that tackling climate change is one of the top priorities for the UN system. Your presence is a sign of our commitment to meet this challenge together. UNESCO is working closely with many agencies across various domains, from climate change science to education for sustainable development.

I hope that this seminar will build on this momentum by generating new partnerships and identifying fresh avenues for collaboration.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Global warming is *the* defining issue of our time. Sustainable development simply cannot be achieved without a stable climate. The poverty crisis, the food crisis, the energy crisis, the economic crisis: we cannot find lasting solutions to any of these global problems without bold action to combat climate change and achieve greener low-carbon growth.

Global warming is already having a negative impact on communities around the world, forcing people to leave their homes and lands to flee rising seas, droughts and other extreme climatic events.

Both immediate and long-term action is needed to stop the threatening advance of climate change.

The most urgent concern is to reach a robust global agreement for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, to replace the Kyoto protocol when it expires in 2012.

Immediate action is also needed to help countries adapt to climate change already taking place. Poor developing countries are least responsible for global warming but most at risk from its effects.

World leaders have a huge responsibility to seal a strong and fair deal on these issues at the UN climate summit in Copenhagen in December.

However, we know that the effects of global warming will be with us for decades and centuries to come – well beyond the timeframe of any new treaty. It is therefore vital that we lay the groundwork for future generations to effectively confront this challenge. We also know that if we want to halt and ultimately reverse global warming we need a radical change in the ways we think and act. This, too, is a long-term process.

Climate change education brings together these two perspectives. It is about helping learners understand and

address the impacts of global warming today, while at the same time encouraging the change in attitudes and behaviour needed to put our world on a more sustainable path in the future.

For UNESCO, climate change education is an integral part of the vision of education for sustainable development (ESD). That is the vision of a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from quality education and gain the knowledge and skills required for sustainable development and positive societal transformation.

As lead coordinator of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, UNESCO is encouraging all its Member States to reorient their education systems in this direction. This means encouraging greater interdisciplinarity – recognizing the social, environmental, economic and cultural dimensions of development and how they interrelate. ESD also means empowering learners to think critically and creatively, to solve complex problems, and to take decisions that consider the long-term future. Above all, ESD is about promoting values that will enable learners to become real agents of change – values such as peace, equality, and respect for others and the wider social and natural environment.

Drawing on this ESD perspective, the present seminar aims to advance thinking and practice on climate change education in several important ways.

It provides a forum for identifying and sharing good practices on how to integrate climate change considerations into educational programmes and curricula. Participants will examine the possible development of guidelines to facilitate this process, as well as ways to improve the collection and dissemination of climate change information and data.

Over the coming three days, you will explore how existing networks – such as UNESCO Associated Schools, UNITWIN networks, World Heritage sites and biosphere reserves – can be used to pilot new educational tools and encourage field-based education that is relevant to local needs. There are many successful models to draw upon – such as the education kit on desertification, which UNESCO piloted through the Associated Schools network, or the teaching kit for dryland communities, developed by UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme. Both provide creative and appealing ways to educate students on major environmental issues.

This seminar will draw particular attention to the training of teachers. If education systems are really to promote change, it is vital that teachers acquire an accurate understanding of climate change and how it relates to broader issues of sustainable development. One of the main aims of this meeting is to sensitize decision-makers on the need to provide much greater support to teacher training on climate change education.

In all these respects, this seminar will provide valuable inputs to discussions on climate change education in the events and processes leading up to the Copenhagen Summit.

Your recommendations will also feed into the strategy UNESCO is developing for the second half of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, following the mid-term review conference held earlier this year in Bonn.

This seminar is, in other words, both important and very timely.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Climate change is a global problem, but it manifests itself distinctly in different parts of the world and among

different groups of people. An effective response must therefore take into account the need for internationally coordinated efforts, while at the same time paying attention to the particular needs of specific populations and regions.

This seminar will put the spotlight on the special needs of small island developing states (SIDS). However, we must not forget that many other countries are also deeply vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Least developed countries (LDCs) in Africa, for example, are confronted by the threats of rapidly accelerating desertification. Just like SIDS, these poor nations urgently require increased international assistance.

Many SIDS comprise small, low-lying islands with limited land and freshwater resources. They are likely to be severely impacted by the projected rise in sea levels and the increase in extreme weather events caused by global warming. SIDS are also likely to be among the first countries confronted by the devastating social and human consequences of climate change – such as the forced migration of entire populations away from islands as they become uninhabitable.

Faced with these risks, there is an urgent need to develop appropriate educational materials on climate change for SIDS.

This means helping small island communities learn to manage their natural resources and ecosystems in a more sustainable way. The flagship UNESCO Sandwatch project is an excellent example of what can be achieved in this regard. Sandwatch provides a framework for school children and local communities to work together to critically evaluate the problems facing their beach environments and develop sustainable management solutions. Since its launch in the Caribbean in 2001, Sandwatch has expanded to the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and is now active in around forty nations worldwide, including about 20 SIDS.

We also need to help learners adapt to the effects of global warming already underway, in particular the heightened risk of natural disasters. UNESCO is working with education ministries to integrate disaster preparedness into national education and development plans. Our Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok has developed a dedicated portal that brings together relevant materials that teachers can use to

prepare their students against natural hazards, from tsunamis to landslides to hurricanes and extreme storms.

The problems faced by SIDS are of primary concern to UNESCO. This is reflected in the priority status given to them in the Organization's current Medium-Term Strategy, as well as by the creation of an Intersectoral Platform to mobilize capacities across the Organization in support of SIDS and the effective implementation of the Mauritius Strategy.

Here I come to the final point I would like to make, which is the need for an interdisciplinary approach to climate change education. That is, an approach that addresses not just the science and technology of climate change, but also its social, cultural and ethical implications.

As a multidisciplinary organization – with expertise in education, the natural and social sciences, culture and communication – UNESCO has a unique opportunity to lead by example. That is why we have established the intersectoral platform on SIDS, as well as platforms to coordinate UNESCO's action on climate change and on education for sustainable development.

You will be hearing more about how these platforms work later today. The key point is that they are grounded in the

assumption that the challenges of climate change and sustainable development are so complex and far-reaching that they can only be tackled through a holistic, interdisciplinary approach.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that the next three days will see much lively debate, and I thank you once again in advance for your participation and contributions.

You will have the opportunity to exchange experiences and good practices on climate change education. You will also be asked to identify networks through which new programmes can be tested and rolled out. I hope that this seminar will provide general guidance on how climate change can be integrated into school curricula and teaching programmes worldwide, while highlighting specific strategies to meet the needs of particularly vulnerable countries and populations.

Be assured that, for its part, UNESCO will continue to assist its Member States in developing educational systems that are relevant to their realities and concerns. We will also bolster our advocacy for education as an agent for change and one of the surest means to prepare

citizens for the reality of living on this small and vulnerable planet.

Your discussions over the coming three days will be important in raising the profile of climate change education and ESD on the international agenda, especially in the run up to the UN climate summit in Copenhagen.

It remains for me to wish you every success in your work; I shall be following the outcomes of your deliberations very closely.

Thank you.