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Address by the  
President of the General Conference

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on the occasion of the closing ceremony  
of the Sixth International Conference on  
Adult Education – CONFINTEA VI

Belem, Brazil  
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Distinguished Minister of Education of Brazil,  
Honorable Governor of Para,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honored, as President of the General Conference, and very delighted, as a member of the Governing Board of the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, to be with you today for **this historic event** that has implications for making the world a better place for the future generations.

I would first like to express **my appreciation to the Government of Brazil** for having graciously hosted this very successful and enjoyable conference. Brazil has demonstrated unwavering commitment and sense of responsibility in addressing global issues and targeting inequalities and marginality.

I am also **most thankful to the UNESCO family**: its field offices, its Headquarters and the UNESCO Institute of Life-long Learning whose staff has worked tirelessly to ensure that the Conference runs smoothly.

Over the past days you have heard a number of impassioned statements on adult education and the ramifications in the absence of action on recommendations. I will echo the comments that have been made in order to strengthen the need for concerted effort on the part of the international community.

There is no doubt that CONFINTEA VI has been a major event. It has managed to create a multi-functional space for 1,150 policy-makers, specialists, activists from civil society and private providers from 156 delegations to exchange and decide on appropriate recommendations. It has been a policy forum, a fair of innovations and good practices, and a mechanism of consultation, negotiation and decision making.

I would like to commend UNESCO, for having taken up the great challenge of leading the adult education movement from CONFINTEA V in Bangkok across the

oceans to Belem. In the process, UNESCO has helped the world gather a momentum for change. **Let us hope that this momentum will now be the force that moves us all forward in placing adult education, not least literacy, at the centre of international efforts to improve the lot of the poor and vulnerable.**

Since CONFINTEA V, **the world has gone through enormous changes, at unprecedented rates.** Many of these changes are positive and promising. But some still pose a threat for a secure future for the generations to come. Our capacities to manage climate change and to stabilise the international financial system have been sorely tested, for example.

In terms of education, it is no exaggeration to say that many improvements have been registered in the adult literacy rates and in the overall innovative efforts at enhancing access to adult education and in extending the variety and quality of materials and delivery. The number of adults without sufficient literacy skills has fallen from 870 million in 1997 to around 776 million (1 in 6 adults).

**But there is still a long way to go.** With the present trend, 700 million adults will still be unable to read and

write by 2015, the deadline for the EFA Goal 4, i.e., “achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women...” **This is a wake-up call to governments and the international community that without a greatly reinforced effort, the EFA will never be achieved.**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Belem Framework of Action states - **“now is the time for action, because the cost of not acting is too high”**. This fact must be our constant reminder that there is much to be gained by investing in adult education not only because it gives the poor and the disadvantaged a much denied opportunity to access what should be a common good but also because **it is a smart investment that contributes to internal stability, a sound economy and democracy**. It is a prerequisite for the creation of happy, productive nation states playing a full part in the work of the international community.

Let me emphasise that here, **we, every one of us, have to work together**, benefiting from each others' strengths and minimising each others' weaknesses. The

good news is that the international community is sitting on a wealth of accumulated knowledge and experience. The test for us is now to ensure strategic collaboration, innovation and policy reform that will enable this accumulated knowledge and experience to be deployed effectively where it is needed.

And in this common endeavour to realise our world vision -- where all will enjoy their rights to life-long learning and to benefit from its fruit -- **I call on you to look to UNESCO for leadership and support.** UNESCO has a new team that is prepared to give the kind of guidance needed for the way forward.

UNESCO is the only intergovernmental organization which has the mandate to work across the great range of CONFINTEA's concerns through all its programme sectors and its excellent Institutes. With its wings spreading across all regions of the world, UNESCO possesses the greatest potential to harness technical support to efforts in adult education and life-long learning. UNESCO can collaborate with partners in programme planning and implementation especially in promoting quality curricula,

building capacity and enhance the professionalism of adult educators and in fund raising.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

**The Belem Framework of Action is a huge accomplishment.** I congratulate all participants from this remarkable spectrum of countries, civil society and private providers, NGOs, international organisations and institutions.

It is a great accomplishment not only for its contents which are timely and relevant but also because of the way it has come into being. **The process is marked by solidarity** in the belief that we, despite our differences and priorities, share a common belief that the 21st Century will leave no adult behind. The extensive consultations that preceded it, the negotiations which continues right here in Belem till early hours in the mornings all evidence of your determination and commitment to make the world a better place through life-long learning.

However, the Belem Framework of Action **is only a beginning**. We must be humble by the colossal and long-term responsibility that this accomplishment brings.

The road may not be paved with rose petals. But with our eyes fixed on the common goal that all adults will enjoy their human rights to life-long learning, to live a better and healthier life because of it, and to develop the wisdom we need for the protection of our precious Mother Earth.

On behalf of UNESCO, **I invite you to walk this way with us, as equal partners. I urge you to be engaged with UNESCO at all levels**, and to make sure that UNESCO's precious resources come to your disposal in our common effort at reaching the world where not only no child, but also no adult, is left behind.

Thank you for your attention.