CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Inauguration Speech

Hao Ping

Vice Minister of Education, China

President, the 37th Session of the General Conference, UNESCO

Nov. 5, 2013

Madam President of the 36th session of the General Conference,
Madam Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Madam Director-General of UNESCO,
Ministers and heads of delegations,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for honoring me with this opportunity of serving the Organization. This is not just an honor for me, but also for my country. Your unanimous endorsement has been a tremendous support and I will keep mind our common goals and I will do my utmost as President of the General Conference.

Please allow me to begin by thanking Madam Bogyay, my
predecessor, for her enormous contributions to the organization.

My gratitude also goes to Madam Cummings, the chairwoman of the executive board. Under your leadership, the executive board has faithfully followed the principles and strategies set by the general conference.

I also thank Madam Irina Bokova, Director-general of UNESCO, for making extraordinary efforts in leading the Organization during a period of great difficulty. In doing so, she has earned the support of the member states.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Founded in 1946, in the aftermath of the World War II, and in response to the global devastation, the Organization’s Constitution states “That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” Hence, building peace became her core mission. I think peace finds its roots in friendship, while the basis of friendship among countries lies in mutual respect, understanding and tolerance. I am reminded of the Chinese poem: “True friends cannot be separated by distance. Close neighbors can reside 10,000 miles apart.”

For 68 years, the Organization has promoted cooperation among
different countries in the fields of education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. For example, milestone achievements can be found in Education for All, which has enabled millions of children to have access to education; and the Convention on Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage, which has raised the concept of preservation of cultural and natural heritage to a new level, and has helped the development of many natural reserves and heritage parks around the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The world today is going through profound changes. The long-term impact of the global financial crisis is felt worldwide, increasing uncertainty in the world’s economic growth, and exacerbating disparities in global development. These crises have been hastened by the deterioration of the environment, climate change, natural disasters, pandemics and the social inequality and injustice, all of which continue to pose severe challenges to us.

These new challenges compel UNESCO to continue to be more
proactive in stimulating the development through education, science and culture. I would like, if you allow me, to share with you, some of my ideas in this regard.

First of all, the Organization should wholeheartedly support the “Global Education First Initiative,” and promotes education equality. Education plays an important role in enhancing the comprehensive development of human society and promoting social justice. Education is instrumental in eradicating poverty and bridging the social divide, in promoting equality and the development of human society. Equal access to educational opportunities levels the difference between social classes, mitigates the impact of poverty to future generations, and facilitates the full and free development of persons.

Education is a basic human right. Equal access to education, as the most important means to enforce social justice, is the cornerstone of social equality. The Organization will continue to coordinate international resources in order to provide assistance to member states, especially African and other developing countries, in order to afford more and better educational opportunities to minorities, women and children, marginalized groups and indigenous peoples, to realize Education for All, among other Millennium Development
Goals.

Secondly, in the field of science, our mission is to integrate innovations in science and technology into national development strategies, and to make them the driving force of sustainable development. Emerging economies are enjoying rapid growth, in which science and technology have made vital contributions. Their experience could be a source of inspirations for other developing nations.

The global financial crisis of 2008 was the product of deep problems in the industrial development of the past 200 years. Traditional modes of industrialization have consumed non-renewable natural resources and resulted in unsustainable development. We are in urgent need to revolutionize modes of development, while relying on innovations that are offered by science and technology.

Ladies gentlemen,

The world is going through the “third industrial revolution”, many breakthroughs have been realized and the Organization must
respond to these developments.

Science and technology transcend national boundaries, even though scientists have nationalities. The Organization should be firmly against the politicization of science and technology. We are for international and transnational cooperation in science and technology, and for encouraging scientists of different countries to work together. Their collaboration can bring forward revolutions in the field of science and technology, which will help our humanity to overcome the problems we are facing.

In order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, it is crucial to link political decisions to scientific knowledge. The aim of UNESCO’s Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme is to transfer relevant social sciences research findings and data to decision-makers and other stakeholders, promoting a culture of evidence-based policy-making – nationally, regionally and internationally.

Thirdly, culture is an important force in maintaining world peace. It should be a fundamental enabler of sustainability, a source of meaning and energy, a wellspring of creativity and innovation, and a resource to address challenges and to find appropriate solutions.
Cultural diversity is the mark of our times; it is expressed through
different ways of living and modes of development. The rich
diversity of cultures is recognized as a source of mutual
understanding and enrichment of innovation. Through such
exchanges and borrowings, we will be able to promote better
understanding of the contribution of each culture as well as the
benefits that can be had from deeper intercultural exchanges.
Therefore it continues to be the task of this Organization to respect
and preserve cultural diversity by promoting exchanges, common
prosperity and harmony among different civilizations.

In the field of communication, through UNESCO leadership, the
potential of ICTs as key enablers of development, and as critical
components of innovations in the post-2015 agenda has been
widely recognized. Its transformational power has proven helpful to
expand access to education and knowledge –sharing, and
accelerate social and economic progress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Organization has come to a crossroads. We face many
challenges in addition to the financial crisis of the past two years.
We must pursue further reform. This is the only way to make the
Organization as effective as we all hope.
For the Organization to move forward, we must march and progress in unity and solidarity. The post-2015 development agenda’s aim is to set out, throughout consensus, a set of goals for the international community to guide cooperation and development in a spirit of equality, mutual trust, inclusiveness, mutual learning and win-win cooperation.

As the president of the 37th session of the General Conference, I would like to advocate the principle of harmony. Chinese philosophy believes that harmony lies in diversity, cooperation and balance. And it produces synergy. Harmony will allow all members to reach consensus and push forward the reform of the Organization.

Here I would like to recall a story that is shared by many cultures in the world. There was an old man who was seriously ill. He asked each of his 20 sons to bring an arrow. Then he asked one of them to break one. The son did so easily. He then bundled the other 19 arrows together, and asked them to try again. Now, none could break the arrows.

This story reminds us of the importance of being united. This General Conference is where we stand as one; it is now and here
that we can make outstanding progress.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Confucius described an ideal world 2000 years ago: one that is equally shared by all. People are promoted for their ability and integrity. They support each other and love not only their own parents and children, but those of others as well. Old people are cared for and children are properly nurtured. All people can fully develop their individual potentials. The world is equally shared by all.

This has been the dream of the Chinese people for 2000 years. Other peoples may have other dreams, based on their different histories and cultures. But I believe, in all of our dreams, there is a world of peace, equality, justice and harmony. The aspiration of this Organization is to realize the dream we all share. To this end, I will join hand with you to shape the future of this Organization for a better world.

As President of the General Conference, I will follow the principle of mutual respect and equality in collecting advice and suggestions for the future development of the Organization. I would be very grateful if you could all share your ideas and aspirations without reservation and facilitate the forming of consensus and unity among the
member states.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge with deep appreciation the hard work carried out by the Secretariat, in bringing together more than 3000 delegates, over 700 journalists and 200 ministers to this conference. As highlighted by the Director-General, Madame Irina Bokova, the Secretariat has “absorbed extra workload and faced up extra pressure” in the midst of great financial difficulties. They are indeed “UNESCO’s main ‘assets” to enable us to achieve our objectives.

Thank you!