

**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of World Science Day for Peace and Development**

10 November 2006

Today we celebrate the vital role that science can play in achieving sustainable development and enhancing prospects for peace. World Science Day for Peace and Development is an opportunity to draw attention to the ways in which science and technology can help to reduce poverty, protect the environment, and improve the quality of life for all.

Today, we also have the responsibility to recognize the obstacles that prevent many countries from fully enjoying the benefits of science. This year, I would like to focus on the specific challenge of strengthening developing country capacity in science as a basic platform for sustainable knowledge-based development.

No nation that wants to achieve social and economic progress can afford to be without independent capacity in science and technology. Over the past two decades, inadequate human and institutional capacity in science has been identified as one of the recurring factors preventing developing countries from reaching national and international goals. Poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, improved access to safe water supply and sanitation services, the reduction of child mortality and the improvement of maternal health: the achievement of all these major international development goals in large part depends upon national capacity in scientific research and development.

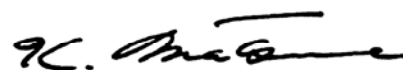
The building of scientific capacity demands a broad-based approach. A well-functioning and inclusive education system is a basic precondition for all forms of science and knowledge-based development. Of importance, too, is the need to strengthen linkages between education institutions and government, industry and the private sector in order to foster innovation and ensure that its fruits are widely diffused. Partnerships at regional and international level are likewise critical to opening up access to training and expertise and creating a unified response to shared development challenges.

In our work to build capacity, we also need to address the issue of retention. One of the major elements undermining developing country capacity in science is the brain drain of scientific professionals to the developed world. The figures here are eloquent. More than 20,000 scientific and technical experts are lost to Sub-Saharan Africa alone

each year when they take up employment in laboratories and research institutions in Europe and the United States of America. One million people from developing countries are studying at higher education institutions in industrialized countries, and one-third of research and development professionals from the developing world reside and work in OECD countries. This constitutes an enormous loss for their native countries in terms of development.

UNESCO is working in close cooperation with the African Union and the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD) to help stem this drain on capacity. Together, we are overseeing a programme to develop, over the next ten years, up to 30 regional centres of excellence on the African continent. By fostering endogenous development, this programme aims to bridge the scientific divide between Africa and the rest of the world and thus to counteract the migration of experts. This network of centres will also provide a strong framework for South-South cooperation, helping to create a critical mass of scientific professionals who are trained to address specific development challenges in the region.

On World Science Day for Peace and Development, UNESCO calls for increased global action to help developing countries build the capacity they need to fully participate in, and benefit from, advances on science.



Koïchiro Matsuura