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Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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Draft

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of the opening ceremony
of the UNESCO/UNU Conference on Africa
and Globalization**

Learning from the past, Enabling a better Future

Tokyo, 28 September 2009

Presidents,
Rector Osterwalder,
Mr State Secretary for Foreign Affairs,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great honour and pleasure to open this 7th UNESCO/UNU International Conference on globalization.

Every year since 2003, UNESCO and UNU have brought together decision-makers and experts from across the world to discuss the implications of globalization on a wide range of subjects, from higher education and science and technology to intangible cultural heritage and linguistic diversity. This year, we adopt a regional perspective, and turn our attention to what globalization means for Africa.

This focus is timely. Half a century since decolonization, Africa confronts an unprecedented new set of challenges and opportunities, which the international community as a whole must address.

On a more personal note, I am also pleased to see Africa in the spotlight. I began my Japanese diplomatic career in Ghana in the early 1960s, covering ten West African countries. Over the following decades, I worked hard to expand Japan's development cooperation with the continent, paving the way for the tremendous increase in Japanese support to Africa in the 1980s and 90s and the launch of the TICAD process.

I carried the same resolve into UNESCO, and since 1999 committed not only to bolster the Organization's support to African Member States, but also build strong relations with the rich network of African regional and sub-regional organizations. This we have done. Today, I am proud to say that meeting Africa's needs is UNESCO's overarching priority.

I am therefore very happy that the last UNESCO/UNU conference I will attend as Director-General focuses on a continent whose growth and development I have worked to support throughout my career.

It is now my great honour to introduce our special guests. We are privileged to have with us many of the makers and shapers of African development over the past half century.

I wish to extend a very warm welcome to former President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria, former President John Kufour of Ghana, former President of Mali and Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Mr Alpha Konaré, former President Sam Nujoma of Namibia, and former President Antonio Eanes of Portugal. Excellencies, thank you for being here and for bringing your experience and wisdom to our discussions.

Let me also welcome and thank our other distinguished participants. Taking part in this conference are policy-makers, renowned experts and civil society representatives from Africa and elsewhere across the world. Welcome to Tokyo.

I would like to thank the Japanese government for giving their support to today's meeting, as they have to every conference since 2003. My special thanks go to Mr

Tetsuro Fukuyama, the State Secretary for Foreign Affairs, for taking time from his busy agenda to address this opening session.

Finally, let me extend my gratitude and appreciation to our partner and host, the United Nations University, in particular my colleague Rector Konrad Osterwalder, and his predecessor, Professor Hans Ginkel, with whom I launched this series. The holding of these annual conferences has become a symbol of the growing cooperation between our two institutions. I hope this collaboration will continue to strengthen into the future.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference takes place at a critical moment for Africa.

The past decade has seen major advances across much of the continent in terms of rising economic growth, falling poverty rates, stronger democratic governance and enhanced regional and sub-regional cooperation.

Yet a series of crises – economic, food, energy, climate, environmental – threaten to derail this progress. We must not let this happen. We cannot allow the gains of recent years to be stalled, or worse turned back.

That is why UNESCO and UNU have convened this conference, as a platform to examine the types of policies needed to keep Africa's development on track. How can we transform this period of multiple crises into an opportunity for positive change?

There are three points I would like to make.

The first regards African leadership. Top-level political commitment to peace and democracy is vital. This is the essential prerequisite for inclusive and sustainable development.

This crisis must be an impetus for African governments to act with far greater urgency to tackle inequities and protect fundamental rights and freedoms. This

includes introducing special measures to insulate the poorest and most vulnerable groups from the effects of the economic downturn and other global shocks. As women and girls are usually the first to suffer, much more must be done to prioritize gender equality in all development initiatives.

However, even the strongest political commitment and best national policies will fail without greater international support. This is my second point: now must be the time for global solidarity.

The economic crisis – like the climate change crisis – was not of Africa’s making. Yet it is the poorest countries, with the least capacity to respond, which are hardest hit. The developed world has a duty to help redress this injustice.

The G8 and the G20 have made many promises. But African countries are still waiting for these pledges to translate into fast and flexible financing on the ground. On humanitarian grounds, and for reasons of global security, rich countries must do much more – and urgently – to assist Africa’s poor.

My third point regards where we should direct our efforts and resources. Times of crisis call for making choices and setting priorities. The smartest decision for Africa’s long-term future is to focus resolutely on enhancing the knowledge and skills of African people by investing in education, science and culture. These three sectors provide the fundamental basis for inclusive and sustainable development. They also represent the drivers of growth in today’s knowledge economy, where human creativity is the most valuable resource. They are, quite simply, the wisest investments any country can make.

Over the past decade, African leaders have committed to bold initiatives to reform their education systems, boost science and technology and mobilize the continent’s rich cultural heritage as a driver of Africa’s renewal.

The African Union has played a pivotal role in leading these reforms. I would like to pay special tribute to Mr Konaré, who as Chairman of the AU commission did so

much to place education, science and culture at the centre of the continent's development agenda.

I had the privilege to attend the AU Summits as special guest when these ambitious initiatives were launched, and UNESCO is working closely with African countries to bring them to success.

Let me say a few words about our work in each of these three priority areas.

I shall begin with our collective efforts to achieve Education for All (EFA) and the education-related Millennium Development Goals.

Two-thirds of the way towards the 2015 target date, we can record real advances. The past decade has seen primary enrolment in Africa jump by 42 percent. This is the highest increase in the world and one of the continent's great success stories. The challenge is to accelerate this progress, while improving quality and expanding access to education at higher levels.

The quality dimension is pivotal. We must ensure that education empowers learners with the skills to improve their lives. That means skills for work, but also for peace and collaborative citizenship, and for living sustainably with the natural world

At their recent meeting in Cairo in June, African finance and education ministers expressed their firm determination to sustain education progress, despite the economic downturn. However, most African countries cannot do this alone. They need external support.

As global leader of the EFA movement, UNESCO will continue to advocate vigorously for donors to fill this financing gap. In particular, the G8 must meet its promise to replenish the catalytic fund of the EFA Fast-Track Initiative, so that countries with robust education plans have the resources to implement them.

UNESCO is also working to strengthen multilateral cooperation, so that governments receive coordinated support that responds to their education priorities.

The second priority for action in Africa is bolstering capacity in science and technology. Today, UNESCO is collaborating with over 20 African countries to revitalize their science policies. One of our first partners was Nigeria, following the initiative by President Obasanjo to place science at the centre of Nigeria's national economic empowerment strategy.

Such strong political commitment to science is particularly important in the current global context. A vibrant science sector is key to Africa's economic recovery and growth. It is also essential to finding solutions to major development challenges, from the food and fuel crises to environmental degradation and climate change. You will be looking tomorrow at how Africa can become a key actor in the emerging green economy. The essential first step is building robust national and regional systems for science, technology and innovation.

This leads me to the third priority for action: culture.

One strong advantage Africa has is its rich cultural heritage. Indigenous knowledge and traditions hold invaluable lessons for sustainable development and biodiversity preservation, not only in Africa but globally.

African leaders have been the first to recognize the importance to development of protecting and harnessing the continent's diverse cultural traditions. Culture figures prominently in the African Union action plan for science and technology, and is at the heart of the vision of the Second Decade of Education.

It goes without saying that UNESCO fully supports this focus. We are working hard to get culture included in UN development assistance frameworks and bilateral funding programmes. Too many development initiatives fail because they do not take this crucial dimension into account.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We come together at a particularly challenging time for Africa. However, with this period of crisis comes a unique opportunity for change. We must seize this chance, and use it to chart a new path for Africa's development. This requires strong

political will, anchored in the right policies and backed by international support.
With such leadership and solidarity we can bring about a more inclusive and sustainable globalization where Africa plays its full and rightful role.

Thank you.