

DG/2000/38
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Welcome Address
by
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of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

at the Meeting of the Working Group on
Education for All

UNESCO, 22 November 2000

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Colleagues,

Good morning.

It is a great pleasure for me, as convener of the Working Group on Education for All, to welcome you all to UNESCO and to this first meeting of the Group. I wish to assure you both of the great importance which UNESCO attaches to the Dakar Follow-up process and of UNESCO's commitment to fulfil its own mandate as defined in Dakar. This mandate is at the same time a vote of confidence and an immense challenge. We interpret the mandate as 'leadership in partnership'. This means that we have to create synergy within the array of different opinions and perspectives among all partners involved in the follow-up process while respecting, as an intergovernmental organization, that governments are the principal authority of the movement and while respecting also the important message from Dakar that the process must be led by the countries through their governments, national NGOs and civil society.

UNESCO's commitment to Education for All has, in fact, been expressed through concrete actions taken ever since I joined this Organization in November 1999, that is, even before the World Education Forum in Dakar. I am sure you are all aware of the ongoing reform process within UNESCO which is affecting its structure, programmes and management. As the other UN organizations, we have to slim down, or downsize, and concentrate our activities in order to become more effective and relevant. While this is obviously painful in many ways, I believe that the reform process has provided us with the opportunity to rethink how the Organization as a whole, and the education sector in particular, can enhance UNESCO's vitality and credibility in the field of education, and how the Organization can best support Education for All in light of its capacities and resources.

The overall structure for the Organization that we are now putting in place is both simpler and more focused than the one we had previously. Each individual part of this new structure, be it a regional office, a field office, a UNESCO institute, the different substantive sectors of the Organization — which are Communication and Information, Social and Human Sciences, Natural Sciences, Culture, and, of course, Education — all have to develop Work Programmes that respond to the need for Education for All.

With respect to the Education Sector, specifically, we have consolidated all work into five Divisions: Educational Policies and Strategies; Basic

Education; Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education; Higher Education; and Promotion of Quality of Education. The particular importance attached to Education for All is reflected in the proposition for an increased budget for Basic Education and in the creation of the two new, transversal Divisions: Promotion of Quality of Education and Educational Policies and Strategies. Furthermore, the Divisions of Secondary, Technical and Vocational Education and of Higher Education have also been requested to design Work Programmes in support of Education for All. The new structure for the education sector and its new emphases will permit us to focus on Education for All across all Divisions and, therefore, to understand and approach specific issues of basic education holistically as a part of the education system in any country and not isolated from the rest of the system.

It is also no coincidence that the newly appointed Deputy Director-General for Education is the Director of the Division of Basic Education, Mrs Aïcha Bah-Diallo, whom I have by my side here today.

Permit me to take this opportunity to dwell also for a moment on someone who has been particularly critical for me in this transition period. This is Jacques Hallak, our current acting Assistant-Director General for Education, whom I have on my other side, and who has assisted me since the beginning of May of this year. I will shortly appoint a new Assistant Director-General for Education who will have the challenge of taking over the leadership of the education sector from someone who is renowned for his work capacity, his task orientation, and for his decision-making and action-oriented leadership style. Many of you know Jacques and have also worked with him in his previous positions within the UNESCO system. You also know, therefore, that Jacques is much more than what I just said. The miracles that happen where ever Jacques treads his ground, they happen not only because he works hard and is a shaker and a mover. They happen not only because of his long experience in the field, or his intimate knowledge and understanding of the issues at stake, or his profound knowledge of UNESCO as an Organization and of all the other players. These miracles happen, in particular I believe, because of his vision and wisdom combined with his personal charisma, enthusiasm and strong perception of human capacities. Jacques can bring out the best in all of us.

Jacques — I am deeply grateful for the support you have provided me and UNESCO at this crucial juncture for the Organization. I hope you will look back on this experience as having been a worthwhile investment of your precious time, now that you have other pressing priorities in your life. I thank you.

I thank you also for agreeing to preside over this first meeting of the Working Group on Education for All. I wish to underline the critical importance I attach to this Group as a core informal mechanism to bring the Dakar Follow-up process forward on the basis of consultation and sharing of experiences among professionals. You will recall that it was decided in Dakar not to establish new permanent structures for EFA coordination. This Working Group has not been mandated to monitor or take decisions on the follow-up to Dakar. Rather, I interpret UNESCO's 'leadership in partnership' to mean that we must have regular technical consultation among partners in order for me to understand the different approaches, perspectives and sensitivities among the different partners. This is the purpose of this first meeting. Its outcomes will assist me not only in the preparation of the meeting of the High-Level Policy Group, which I shall come back to a little later, but also in proposing informed strategic actions for the process ahead of us.

The Dakar follow-up process is a collective undertaking at all levels and through all existing mechanisms. However, I consider it to be of particular importance that this Working Group provide a forum for active discussion of the concrete experiences at the country level as they are understood by governments and national groups. In any aspect of the development process, it is important that we learn and understand the issues as they are experienced by the key actors concerned. National ownership depends on endogenous development. We must define our strategies and determine our pace in response to home-grown, nationally motivated and nationally determined action. It is the actors on the ground — who have grown out of and are living inside the process — who are likely to bring the best sense of realism into the work. We must all listen to them carefully.

I have decided to compose the Working Group of professionals from all the major partners in the regions and countries, from the international funding and technical assistance agencies, including the UN system, and from NGOs. In this composition, I have aimed at ensuring a fairly balanced North-South representation in response to the clear understanding that the key responsibility for the Dakar Follow-up process lies at the national level, and that the international community is to play a supportive, catalytic role.

You have been selected as participants based on your professional competence and involvement in the EFA process, and not as elected representatives of your organizations. As I said before, this is a meeting of technical experts. We must benefit from the diversity within this group and

build on the strengths of each and everyone in order that we can build up a truly participatory process aimed at reaching common goals and targets. Despite the somewhat formal surroundings in this room, the intended spirit of this meeting is *informality* — or *structured informality* as some people now say. I urge you all, also my own colleagues, to leave your organizational agendas behind and to speak your mind freely and constructively.

This first meeting will be followed by others which I will convene. Because of the need to involve all partner groups, we have had to reconcile the imperatives of size and manageability in the actual composition of this meeting. We have had to adopt a principle of rotation which will allow different professionals to contribute to the deliberations in different meetings and at the same time make for manageable meetings able to reach concrete outcomes. In addition, we have permitted wide participation of observers some of whom are located in the room next door with coverage of the discussions in this room by video. It is critical, however, that those present in each individual meeting fulfil their responsibility to share its inputs and results broadly with their constituencies, in order that we can ensure continuity, institutional memory and optimal progress on the ground.

You have all received a copy of the programme. As you can imagine, with a *multi-faceted* concept like Education for All, with a *global* initiative like Education for All, and with a *diversified* interest group like this Working Group, much consideration has gone into the design of a programme that could encompass the wide-ranging content aspects, the widespread activities in the area, and the multiple national, regional and international partners. It has also been necessary to strike a balance between, on one hand, building a common framework of knowledge and understanding of what is happening in the regions, countries and various organizations in terms of concrete activities after Dakar and, on the other, of identifying core areas of key concern that deserve special attention in order to shape the Education for All process in the immediate future.

This explains why, today, you will hear from a wide range of participants on what is happening on the ground and on how certain initiatives may have been strengthened or modified or otherwise affected by the results of the World Education Forum in Dakar. During these presentations and the subsequent discussions, you are likely to begin to touch upon, amongst others, the three core issues that have been selected for in-depth discussion tomorrow:

- The first one relates to the need for countries to produce Education for All action plans. UNESCO has developed Guidelines for this purpose as part of

the commitment and duty of the international community and the UN system to assist the EFA process. You will also be discussing how nationally developed action plans can be linked with other plans, strategies and policy frameworks.

- The second issue relates to what is called the global initiative, or how the international community can best support national Education for All efforts in terms of resource mobilization. UNESCO will present its Work in Progress on this matter and will play a role as mobilizer of international funding.
- The third question is how the Education for All process can best be monitored nationally, regionally and internationally. You will discuss UNESCO's observatory function and the need for close cooperation at all levels in this respect.

There are, of course, many other issues that also deserve ample time for discussion. This first meeting may well serve to identify such issues which could then be taken up later on. We have selected those mentioned because of their implications for the whole process and because of the necessity to reach agreement about appropriate plans, strategies and systems as early in the process as possible. You should, therefore, attach high importance to the reflective work required of you in the thematic break-away groups tomorrow afternoon which can lead to more specific proposals in these areas.

The outcomes from the meeting and the recommendations from the thematic groups will be used in different ways to further the Education for All process. One is, of course, in your own work within your own organizations. Another is to help shape the agenda of the informal, flexible, high-level policy group I am setting up under my direct authority. The purpose of this high-level group, which as its name indicates will be composed of individuals from the highest levels nationally, regionally and internationally, is to ensure fulfilment of the stated commitment for the Education for All process in countries, regions and in international organizations. I hope that we will succeed in establishing a highly fruitful relationship between the work of this Group here and the high-level policy group whose first meeting is expected to take place in March of next year.

We all wish to see positive developments towards the goals and targets for Education for All and towards the other targets to reduce poverty by the year 2015. I believe that we *can* make true headway towards these targets even

though the challenges we have ahead of us are huge. I believe so for several reasons:

- There is a high level of *agreement* in the international community concerning what needs to be done.
- We have extensive *knowledge* of how to do it.
- And we have the *means* to do it if we decide to use those means.

But we have to sustain the momentum of the political will expressed in Dakar in April and at other high-level political meetings, for example in the context of the G8 countries. We must keep the targets on the top of our various agendas internationally, regionally and nationally. And we must make a consolidated effort to translate political will and commitment into actions that can help transform the lives of those who need it the most: children, women, the poor, the marginalized and the excluded.

This must be the essence of Education for All.

This is why you are here. You are here to ensure that Education for All remains a key focus in national, regional and international development efforts. You are here to help move the process forward in a consolidated manner.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have been discussing the right of the child to free education for more than half a century. We have been discussing global inequalities, North-South divides, and the rift between the rich and the poor for decades. Let us not continue to just talk. This forum is fortunate in that it brings together such qualified representatives of both reflection and action, and of policy and practice. I shall make it a particular priority to ensure the same balance when setting up my high-level policy group. Let us forge the link between reflection and action. Let us together build the bridge between policy and practice.

I strongly believe that we cannot justify letting another decade go by, only to realize at the end of it that nothing much has changed for those who need change the most. We must find the best way forward together. We must reach across differences. YOU must make this happen. Not only today,

tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. But as full partners in a process that will be monitored and measured against goals and targets for 2015. And, perhaps even more important than that, measured against the need to prove to the future that the world *does* have a conscience, that we *are* capable of setting self-serving interests aside, and that we *are* able to use our wisdom and knowledge for the benefit of development for those who need it the most.

Colleagues,

I wish you a very productive time together during the next three days. I look forward keenly to the outcomes of this meeting. And I shall do my very best to ensure that these outcomes are acted upon in our own institutional context within UNESCO and in the context of the high-level policy group.

I thank you for your attention.