

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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(UNESCO)

to the third meeting of the Working Group on Education for All (EFA)

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Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the third meeting of the Working Group on Education for All (EFA). I see before me a number of faces that are familiar from previous meetings of the Working Group or other occasions but, in addition, there are many new participants, to whom I offer a particularly warm welcome and my special thanks for coming here. I believe it is very important that the Working Group combines the benefits of continuity with the refreshment brought by new voices and different constituencies of opinion and interest. I will return to these considerations later.

During the course of our meeting last year, we received the shocking news of the events of 11 September. These events occurred just days after the 46th session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) in Geneva, organized by UNESCO's International Bureau of Education (IBE). The theme of this Conference, which was attended by Ministers of Education from around the world, was "Education for all for learning to live together". Clearly, someone's finger was on the pulse of our times.

It has to be said that the Conference was not a response to terrorism or its threat, but was focused on the divisions, tensions and conflicts within and between societies that make peace vulnerable or place it out of reach. Addressing this broader agenda, the Conference's participants agreed that much more must be done through education, and education for all in particular, to foster learning to live together.

My reasons for raising this matter are two-fold. First, I wish to emphasize that learning to live together is a vital and fundamental educational issue not simply for UNESCO, for whom it has a natural appeal and resonance, but for all of us. The theme of learning to live together has a somewhat subdued presence in the Dakar Framework for Action but it is certainly part of what EFA is all about. Second, this issue reminds us that, while EFA is important in its own right, it serves a number of other purposes. This is evident from the way that different partners bring different perspectives, interests and priorities to bear upon the EFA agenda. Some may see basic education first and foremost as a vital factor of economic growth or social development. For others, EFA is a vehicle for national mobilization or national reconstruction. Some may see EFA mainly in terms of gender, especially the educational rights, needs and opportunities of girls and women, while others may regard it as a way to overcome social exclusion and poverty or to promote universal values, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

These alternatives, of course, do not exhaust the range of perspectives available, nor are they mutually exclusive. But they do serve to highlight the fact that the EFA movement is broad and pluralistic. The strength of our partnership, in fact, derives from two main sources. On the one hand, the EFA vision and the Dakar goals are agreed and attract our collective commitment. On the other hand, by harnessing and harmonizing our different approaches, strategies and priorities, our EFA partnerships bring a variety of strengths into play.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, the EFA vision is more compelling than ever. It is a vision which continues to shape the purposes and processes of this Working Group and which has found expression in a number of encouraging ways since we last met. I would like first to recall several positive developments of the past months before outlining some changes affecting the specific context of this meeting.

In the two years since Dakar, we have all been concerned to see real and measurable progress in EFA at the national level. Planning and the allocation of resources are central strategies, and there has been progress on both fronts. The planning deadline of December this year is focusing effort in many countries, though it is clear that some will have difficulty in meeting that deadline. There was some questioning of the framework within which national EFA planning should take place, but there is now a broad-based consensus on the need for flexible processes. What is important is that EFA planning should take place, as a deliberate and inclusive process at national level, whether the framework is education sector planning, a PRSP process or some other planning framework. This consensus, I believe, has enabled clearer lines of communication and support to be established among partners — particularly between the national and international levels. The insights of India and Burkina Faso at today's meeting will be instructive in this respect. Moreover, the regional forums on EFA planning, which UNESCO has facilitated, have maintained the planning momentum and enriched national efforts.

Last year, concerns were expressed about the coherence and coordination of international efforts in support of EFA, so I am particularly pleased to present to you the 'International Strategy to put the Dakar Framework for Action on EFA into operation', which has been published in time for this meeting. This Strategy reflects in large measure the fruit of the labours of the Working Group's meeting last year. You tackled frontally the challenge of giving shape to such a strategy and you gave professional leadership to the task of structuring its contents. The High-Level Group picked up the work and delegated to a representative Task Force the job of producing the document. It now presents

five core elements of EFA strategy, as well as spelling out what it will mean to put the twelve Dakar strategies into operation. It thus provides a framework for EFA partnerships, particularly how international agencies can best support action at the national level.

With regard to EFA financing, recent meetings have increased the likelihood of fulfilling the Dakar commitment that “no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted...by a lack of resources.” We welcome the pledges of Monterrey and the G8 Summit in Canada. The idea of a development compact is highly attractive and the broad emphasis on issues of good governance, such as democracy, human rights, accountability and responsibility, is welcome. Allow me, however, to briefly raise a cautionary note by asking whether this stress on governance will always be helpful to education. If increased support to education is made dependent on the wide-scale reform of an entire system of governance, education may be held back through no direct fault of its own. Perhaps it would be preferable for educational assistance to be linked to the reform of the administration, governance and accountability of the education system itself. I believe that careful monitoring of how the development compact influences education should be undertaken. I would welcome the Working Group’s reflections on this matter.

With regard to the G8 meeting in Canada in particular, the G8’s concern to reduce the burden on recipient countries is commendable, as are the G8’s efforts to maintain convergence among EFA partners. It is clear that the work of the G8’s Education Task Force raised awareness among the world’s leading industrialized countries of the challenge and fundamental value of investing in education. I should add that I had a very useful exchange of views with members of the Task Force at its final meeting in Paris in mid-May.

The educational challenge in Africa remains daunting, not least because efforts are seriously threatened by the HIV/AIDS crisis whose impact may reduce life expectancy by over 40 years in some countries. I am heartened by the emerging support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), which was endorsed at the G8 Summit in Canada. The US\$6 billion promised in new support to Africa must include substantial allocations to basic education in order to develop the full potential of the continent's rich human resources.

The World Bank's ‘fast-track’ initiative, part of its action plan for EFA, provides a mechanism for moving resources effectively and quickly to countries ready to implement plans for primary education. The World Bank deserves much credit for this initiative and for raising the profile of education within its

own scheme of priorities. In addition, we should acknowledge that the role of civil society in shaping these financing schemes and moving them forward has been crucial.

Communication and advocacy are important strategic tools, as illustrated by the Global EFA Week held last April which included activities in 90 countries. I would like to express my appreciation for the efforts made by civil society organizations to publicise the event and to engage national civil society and non-governmental networks in planning activities to mark the Week. This expanded considerably what was undertaken by national governments, sister UN agencies and UNESCO's regional and cluster offices. I look forward to increasing such fruitful cooperation in the coming year. Please note that, during a recent video conference on girls' education arranged by the United Nations Development Group (UNDG), I suggested that next year's EFA Week might take gender equity as its main theme, bearing in mind the imminence of the 2005 deadline. This suggestion received support on that occasion. The advice of the Working Group on this matter would be appreciated.

I turn now to two important developments occurring over the past months which help to contextualize this Working Group meeting: first, the new investment in the EFA Monitoring Report and, second, the changing nature of the High-Level Group.

Both the Working Group and the High-Level Group called last year for an analytical and authoritative monitoring report. It is therefore gratifying that a competent team has been put together and that it is hard at work to produce the 2002 Report. As agreed, this team will enjoy the independence it needs to produce a rounded and objective report.

While the team is hosted by UNESCO and benefits from the logistical support of the Dakar Follow-up Unit here at Headquarters and the professional expertise of the Institute for Statistics in Montreal, the EFA Monitoring Report is very much an exercise in broad partnership. Thus, it will draw upon the financial data of OECD regarding aid flows and on data generated by the World Bank, whose valuable analytical work has been vital for identifying EFA-related financing gaps.

I would like to express once again my particular thanks to DFID (UK) for its support for the EFA Monitoring Report. DFID's support has been both generous and timely and has made a great difference. I should also mention that we have received an indication of potential support from SIDA of Sweden for the EFA Monitoring Report, in recognition of its importance for the work of

Dakar follow-up and the International Strategy. We very much welcome such further support.

During your deliberations, you will have the opportunity to comment on progress made so far towards the generation of the 2002 EFA Monitoring Report. Indeed, the Working Group's advice to the team is a vital contribution to the whole process. In this regard, please note that the Editorial Board of the EFA Monitoring Report will meet immediately following this meeting of the Working Group. Your reflections and advice will therefore be quite timely.

The High-Level Group met for the first time last year and, amongst other things, called for changes in the way it functioned. This year, when it meets in November in Abuja, Nigeria, it will be smaller, more outcome-oriented, more business-like and with a more focused agenda, based on a high quality EFA Monitoring Report. I am optimistic that this year's meeting of the High-Level Group will provide a step-change in the dynamics of the Dakar follow-up process. A significant related development is that, back-to-back with the High-Level Group, on 27 November 2002 there will be an EFA Donors' Conference in Brussels hosted by the European Commission.

The Working Group adds value to the EFA process by being the only forum where technical and professional experts representing all parts of the EFA family gather internationally. The High-Level Group and the Working Group share common ways of working. Continuity is assured by the sustained presence of multilateral and bilateral representatives, while fresh perspective comes from a rotating membership from developing countries. Over a number of years, this approach will enable all developing countries to take part in these processes. Links between the two groups will be provided by a meeting of high-level aides ('sherpas'). In addition, commonality of agenda is ensured by being centred around the elements of the EFA International Strategy: planning, advocacy, funding, implementation, monitoring, and building and strengthening partnerships.

In conclusion, I return to the strategic timing of this meeting. Two years on from Dakar, we see progress in putting mechanisms and resources into place to move the EFA agenda forward. The six Dakar goals reflect that renewed commitment and, in a meeting like this, we must ensure that no aspect of these goals is neglected. We must take the measure of our joint international efforts to guarantee that no population group remains marginalized from appropriate educational opportunities and no country is abandoned or overlooked, including countries in conflict and in post-conflict situations. The vision of Education **for All** remains just that — I urge you to keep this vision before you in your deliberations, and wish you every success in your efforts.

Thank you.