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Organisation  
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Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**REMARKS BY H. E. D. HAMADZIRIPI, PERMANENT DELEGATE OF ZIMBABWE, CHAIRMAN OF THE AFRICA GROUP IN UNESCO AT THE CLOSING SESSION OF THE MEETING OF THE SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE FOR THE PEDAGOGICAL USE OF THE GENERAL HISTORY OF AFRICA, PARIS, 20 MARCH 2009**

Mr Chairman,

The Assistant Director-General for Culture, Mme Riviere,

Distinguished members of the Scientific Committee,

Permanent Delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to address this closing session of the first meeting of the Scientific Committee for the Pedagogical use of the General History of Africa.

I wish, on behalf of the Africa Group in UNESCO, to express our gratitude to all of you, the distinguished members of the Scientific Committee, for accepting to assume the heavy responsibilities that this assignment entails. Having had the privilege of observing you at work in one of your meetings two days ago, I was left in no doubt that you will be more than equal to the task. The professional approach, open discussion and intellectual rigour you displayed impressed me as to your determination to execute your mandate to the full.

As your own discussions revealed, the task before you is multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary. It requires many minds and hands on board for its comprehensive and effective execution. I wish to assure you, in this regard, that the Africa Group in UNESCO, among whose membership is to be found some expertise on issues relevant to your work, stands ready to partner you in this task. The Africa Group is equally ready to play other roles to complement your own scientific and intellectual preoccupations. Some members of the Africa Group are scholars in their own right who are animated by this challenge of elaborating common history curricula and textbooks, introducing a regional dimension, developing new concepts and strengthening the linkages between culture and education. To that end, the Africa Group wishes to be closely associated with and be regularly informed of the work of the Scientific Committee.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The launching of this project on the pedagogical use of the General History of Africa could not have been possible without the personal commitment of the Director-General, Mr Koichiro Matsuura, and the relentless efforts and perseverance of the Secretariat of UNESCO to bring it to fruition. It also could not have seen the light of day had it not been for the deep political commitment and generous financial contribution of the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. We are indeed deeply indebted to both the Libyan government and its leadership and to the Director-General of UNESCO and his team for their respective immense contributions.

Mr Chairman,

The proof of the success of this project will be seen not in its formal conclusion as per the project proposal document but rather in the actual publication and use in African Schools of the textbooks and other material that will result from your work. It is evident that, on your own, you cannot achieve this objective. You will need many partners and collaborators to attain that lofty goal and, in my opinion, chief among those partners will be the political leaders, especially the Ministers of Education, in Africa. The primordial role of the political leaders in realizing the effective success of this endeavour is indeed recognized and underlined in the project document which emphasises that "the political commitment of the African States is of paramount importance for the successful implementation of the project." I wish, therefore, to welcome the announced plans to include this subject on the agenda of the next Summit meeting of the African Union as well as of the next meeting of the African Ministers of Education.

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

One of the abiding criticisms of the many failed development projects and programmes in Africa has been that they were foreign impositions on our countries. One of the major selling points of many initiatives and programmes in Africa of late is the claim, whose veracity I cannot confirm, that they are home-grown. Claims of National or local ownership of initiatives or programmes has become a mantra even if it may not be so in fact. It is our wish that African countries and African people truly own this project and its processes as it lies at the heart of current and ongoing efforts to build a confident African citizenship and identity in an integrated African continent. This project is critical in contributing to a change of perceptions not only of Africans about ourselves but also of others about us who are studying or are generally interested in our continent and its people.

Mr Chairman,

In conclusion, I wish the Scientific Committee every success in this exciting and challenging journey that you have embarked on. Be assured that you are not alone on this journey. The Africa Group in UNESCO and, I have no doubt, many other stakeholders the world over will assiduously accompany you in your work over the next four years of the project and beyond.

Thank you.