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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of 10th award ceremony
of the Prize of the Foundation
of Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain for Poetic Creativity “Chawki-Lamartine”**

UNESCO, 31 October 2006

Mr President of the Foundation of Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain,
Mr President of the International Foundation for Dialogue among Civilizations,
Mr Secretary General of the Arab League,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you all to UNESCO Headquarters for this tenth award ceremony of the Foundation of Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain's Prize for Poetic Creativity.

Allow me first to pay tribute to the Foundation, and in particular to its President, Mr Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain, for their outstanding efforts to promote poetry, through this prize, as well as through publications, conferences, translations and training courses.

Let me also pay tribute to our distinguished guests. It is a great honour to have with us here today the President of the International Foundation for Dialogue among Civilizations and the Secretary General of the Arab League. Your presence demonstrates the outstanding importance of this event, and the high profile it has gained within the region.

I would like finally to extend my sincere thanks to H. E. Dr Abdulrazzak Al-Nafisi, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Kuwait to UNESCO, for his work in organizing today's award ceremony. May I also add that UNESCO greatly

appreciates the enthusiasm with which you chair the Consultative Committee for the Arabia Plan. Like the Foundation of Abdulaziz Saud Al-Babtain, this Plan seeks to promote greater understanding and appreciation of Arab cultures across the world. It forms an important part of UNESCO's work to build intercultural dialogue in pursuit of peace.

UNESCO is deeply honoured to host the tenth session of the Foundation's Prize for Poetic Creativity. It is only the second time that this ceremony has been held in Europe. UNESCO considers this to be an excellent opportunity to reflect on the notion of intercultural dialogue, as well as on the role of the poet in encouraging mutual understanding and respect among cultures.

The aims of the Foundation – to celebrate poetic creativity in the Arab region and to communicate this inspirational heritage throughout the world – these aims resonate deeply with the mission of UNESCO.

Encouraging creativity, and enabling it to flourish in a spirit of diversity and freedom, is one of the best ways of promoting cultural vitality and, through this, of sustaining human development. It is in this spirit that UNESCO has launched several literary and poetic initiatives, including the celebration of World Poetry Day and the establishment of a World Poetry Directory. Such activities correspond closely to the Foundation's own work.

UNESCO's efforts to support creativity are intimately linked to its commitment to cultural diversity and dialogue. Creativity keeps our cultural heritage alive, and also furnishes new methods for communication and understanding. Conversely, cultural heritage is itself a powerful stimulus to creativity, and bears witness to the rich diversity of cultures and their interaction and mutual enrichment over time. This is particularly well brought out in UNESCO's Roads of Dialogue projects, which celebrate the creative force of intercultural contacts and exchanges at different times of history, including troubled ones.

This spirit of creativity through dialogue is well exemplified in the life and work of the two poets we honour here today. Ahmad Chawki and Alphonse de Lamartine draw attention to the great potential that exists for fertile interchange between Arabic and European cultures.

The physical and spiritual journeys of these two poets, between East and West, are not uncommon. Contacts between the Arab world and Europe have existed since ancient times. Throughout history, the Mediterranean has functioned as a cultural crossroads in which different civilizations have interacted and flourished, nourishing the development of Eastern and Western thought.

The seminars organized to mark the tenth prize-giving session provide an excellent opportunity to reflect on these roads of dialogue, and in particular on the lessons they may provide in our own efforts to foster greater understanding between East and West. Chawki and Larmartine have much to teach us in the art of mutual understanding, respect and dialogue.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now my great pleasure to congratulate the laureates of the 10th session of the Foundation. They know that they have an important mission to fulfill, a mission that is both aesthetic and ethical. Poetry possesses a unique pedagogical virtue. Combining intelligence with sensibility, poetry speaks to all of man's being, capturing the essence of our shared humanity. The rhythmic nature of poetry lends itself naturally to music and songs, which reinforces its power of communication. And in today's era of globalization, new information technologies offer unprecedented possibilities for expanding the influence of poetry still further, especially among young people.

More than ever before, poets are called upon to promote the ideals of justice and peace around the world. Let me therefore conclude with these inspiring words by the French poet, Guillaume Apollinaire: « je sais que ceux qui se livrent au travail de la poésie font quelque chose d'essentiel, de primordial, de divin ».

I thank you for your attention and wish you success in your deliberations.