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

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
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**Address by Mrs Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO,  
on the occasion of the award ceremony of the  
UNESCO/Emir Jaber al-Ahmad Al-Jaber al-Sabah Prize  
to promote quality education for persons  
with intellectual disabilities**

**Kuwait, 8 December 2009**

Your Royal Highness the Emir of the State of Kuwait,  
Dr Moudi Al-Humoud, Minister of Education and Higher Education,  
Dr Magrab, President of the International Jury,  
Mr President of the Kuwait National Commission for UNESCO,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today we are together to honour the winners of the UNESCO/Emir Jaber al-Ahmad Al-Jaber al-Sabah Prize to promote quality education for persons with intellectual disabilities.

This prize carries deep significance. It testifies to the generosity of the late Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Jaber and of his commitment to ensure the right to quality education for every person. I am greatly honoured that your Highness is here today to award the prize and deeply grateful that you are committed to continue this tradition.

The UNESCO/Emir prize celebrates individuals whose dedication, talent and humanity have touched the lives of persons who are among the most marginalized and invisible in the world.

It is estimated that one-third of the world's out-of-school population is disabled and only two percent of disabled children attend school. We have a very long way to go for learning to benefit all children and adults. Persons with intellectual disabilities have a high chance of being excluded from education. Many parents have fought uphill battles to combat stereotypes and overcome prejudice in order to give their

children access to quality education and to a nurturing and supportive learning environment.

The UNESCO/Emir Prize, given every two years, rewards one person or institution from the Arab region, and one from another part of the world, for their contribution to promote quality education for persons with intellectual disabilities. The international Jury is chaired by Dr Phyllis Magrab, professor of Pediatrics and director of the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development. She is a highly respected international advocate for education and a very great friend to UNESCO. Let me take this opportunity to thank Dr Magrab for her leadership and lifetime commitment to improving the well-being of vulnerable children.

It gives me great pleasure to confirm the two laureates recommended by the jury: Dr Rima Hatoum from Lebanon and Mrs Judith Anne McKenzie, from South Africa. My warm congratulations to both distinguished winners.

Dr Rima Hatoum, you have been involved in the field of disabilities for over 35 years as a teacher, trainer, curriculum specialist and researcher. You have taught students with disabilities at all levels, and developed training manuals and education programmes for children with severe or profound disabilities. Your work has systematically been guided by a focus on children's rights and a commitment to enhance the quality of life of persons with disabilities. You are valued by parents' organizations and recognized as an influential advocate of children's rights and inclusive education. Your outstanding work – both through research and practice – has benefited the lives of many persons with intellectual disabilities, their families and more widely, the international community of teachers, researchers and policy makers.

Today's second prize winner is Ms Judith Anne McKenzie. You have worked in the field of disability for close to thirty years, starting your career in a rural hospital where you established a speech and hearing therapy department. The parent of a son with Down Syndrome, you have been engaged in community based initiatives to address disability, exclusion and poverty in your country, South Africa. You have worked to include disabled children in early childhood development programmes, developed curricula for early childhood educators and trained teachers. You organized the first African Conference promoting the resilience of persons with

intellectual disabilities. Your research and active engagement have influenced decision-makers to adopt more inclusive attitudes, policies and practices.

You are both role models, committed to a rights-based inclusive approach to education. Your work has contributed to changing attitudes towards persons with intellectual disabilities and to providing teachers, educators and policy makers with knowledge about how to improve the quality of life of persons with intellectual disabilities.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international community is gradually moving towards a more inclusive rights-based approach to education. The six Education for All goals adopted in Dakar by 164 governments in the year 2000 aim to provide quality education for all children, youth and adults, with targets set in 2015 to achieve universal primary education, gender equality in education and significant improvements in adult literacy. Education for All will not be reached without specifically addressing the causes of exclusion and creating learning opportunities to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized children and adults. UNESCO is leading the international drive to reach these goals.

I see several positive trends that reflect a genuine change in our perceptions of persons with disabilities. The first relates to rights because inclusion is rooted in the right to education. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that entered into force in May 2008 is a milestone in the effort to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. Article 24 specifically states that education of persons with disabilities must foster their participation in society, their sense of dignity and self-worth, and the development of their personality, abilities and creativity. Our two prize winners today have devoted their life to this quest.

Article 24, on which UNESCO worked with several disability organizations, requires signatories to ensure that all disabled children have access to an inclusive quality, free primary and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live. The Convention provides guidance to states and other actors on how to make their educational system more inclusive. What is

important is not only to ensure that persons with intellectual disabilities enjoy quality learning opportunities, but that they are fully integrated in their communities. This is the only way to overcome fear and prejudice and instead, to promote their pride and dignity.

Inclusive education is moving to the center of policy agendas because governments are realizing that it is the only way to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The concept is now more broadly understood as education that respects diversity and encourages a culture of participation. An inclusive system benefits all learners, without discrimination.

Last November UNESCO organized an international conference on inclusive education that brought together ministers of education from 153 countries along with a wide range of partners from civil society, intergovernmental and multilateral organizations. All participants stressed the importance of an inclusive education approach to accelerate progress towards the Education for All goals. They called on governments to develop policies that provide education support for different categories of learners and to train teachers to meet the needs of highly diverse student populations.

As participants emphasized, inclusive education contributes to building more inclusive societies. This is really at the heart of our mission. Education does not happen in isolation but it can show the way by combating discrimination and cultivating respect, tolerance and democratic values. Inclusive cultures do not segregate but integrate. A culture of inclusion is about learning to live together, to respect our differences and learn from each other. This is the only direction we can take to build more peaceful, cohesive societies in a world marked by inequality and insecurity.

All UNESCO's programmes in education, culture, science and communication aim to promote a culture of inclusion. Our greatest challenge is to learn to live together in a spirit of solidarity and sharing. We have much to learn from children with intellectual disabilities, and much to give them. Equanimity is to live equal in dignity no matter what our differences, and to help those who are among society's most vulnerable individuals.

The admirable work of Dr Rima Hatoum and Ms Judith Anne McKenzie is conducted in this spirit. I trust that the exposure given by this Prize will further enhance the commitment of all countries to the well-being of children and adults with intellectual disabilities, and be an encouragement to all those working in this field.

In closing, I wish to extend my thanks to all those who have made today's event possible. Once again, congratulations to our two laureates and my deepest gratitude to the Emir of Kuwait for making this prize possible.

Thank you.