

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion
of the Summit of Heads of State of West Africa

Bamako, 27 November 2000

Mr President of the Republic of Mali,
Your Excellencies, Heads of State and Government,
Distinguished Ministers,
Distinguished Representatives of International Organizations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to accept the invitation extended to me by the President of the Republic of Mali, Mr Alpha Oumar Konaré. I am especially pleased to do so, Mr President, because I was greatly impressed by your visionary approach on the occasion of the round table on intercultural dialogue that I organized in New York, on 5 September 2000, the eve of the Millennium Assembly, and which you did me the great honour to attend.

I welcome the fact that, seven months after the Dakar Forum, it is in Africa that the first regional follow-up meeting is being held, with the participation of six Heads of State. The six countries of which you are the leaders are among those where the most vigorous efforts are needed to achieve Education for All. I wish to pay tribute to President Konaré for convening this meeting, aware as he is of the need for these six countries to confirm their political involvement swiftly and at the highest level, and to reflect together on the action that must be taken.

I should also like to pay tribute to the foresight of all the Heads of State and Government gathered here, who, through their collective mobilization today, are sending out a strong signal both to their populations and to the international community regarding their determination to fight for human and sustainable development in their respective countries. We are all aware that the essential prerequisite for such development is education, and the fulfilment of each citizen's potential that education makes possible.

Finally, I should like to express once again my profound thanks to Senegal for the exemplary organization of the Dakar Forum and to pay a special tribute to its President, Mr Abdoulaye Wade, whose remarkable opening address is an inspiration to all the participants.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The World Forum on Education for All was a source of satisfaction to the international community as a whole and to UNESCO in particular. Two important messages have emerged from it.

The first, and in my view the most significant, is the clear assumption of responsibility for the Education for All process by the States themselves. Through the voices of the many ministers of education who came to Dakar, the States affirmed their determination to take the reins into their own hands. It is indeed at the national level that action is decisive. Only real political commitment, rational budget decisions and national and international partnerships will enable countries to make progress and attain the goals set at Dakar.

The second message of the Forum is the strong show of international solidarity. The providers of development assistance pledged that no country which demonstrates genuine

determination to attain Education for All, and which has viable plans to that end, should be prevented from doing so by a lack of resources.

Many other messages are also significant. Emphasis has been placed on the importance of taking regional action, setting up mechanisms for the pooling of experience, sharing information and identifying needs that might be met through joint efforts, optimizing the use of existing resources and mobilizing additional resources. The decisive role of civil society as a whole – whether non-governmental organizations, voluntary and community groups or the private sector – and the need to associate civil society closely with efforts to achieve education for all were the subject of lively debate. All these partners are dynamic forces which have experience and specific knowledge of certain sectors of society; they have had successes, and also failures; they can see economic implications in the development of the “education market”. All these partners can add their contributions, strengths and support to the efforts made by States in this common cause.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The situation of education in sub-Saharan Africa attracted legitimate attention at the Dakar Forum. In the course of the last decade, considerable efforts have been made and positive results achieved in some countries of the subregion. But the overall situation is far from satisfactory.

Your development efforts are countered by the implacable vicious circle of poverty, debt, armed conflict, the AIDS pandemic and the negative side effects of modernization and urbanization.

We all agreed at Dakar that education is undoubtedly a prerequisite for breaking out of this infernal logic once and for all. But we all agreed, too, that we must radically review our method of approaching and thinking about education.

Education must be able to respond to a whole range of needs, contexts and populations. It must enable each and every individual to participate in the global knowledge society, both as a beneficiary and as a producer. It must also be the means of preserving and perpetuating linguistic diversity, local customs and national cultures – inalienable elements of the heritage of humanity.

This Summit testifies to your commitment and your determination to fulfil the education pledge in your countries. Identifying the needs, determining the priorities and implementing the proper education policies: the task ahead of you is tremendous.

This Summit of Heads of State and Government, the meeting of ministers of education and finance which preceded it, and the seminar on the contribution of civil society which follows it, are eloquent examples of what can be undertaken at the subregional and regional levels. Above and beyond the diversity of national contexts, there are common situations facing the subregion, and these must be handled collectively.

I welcome on this occasion the happy initiative you took in inviting your finance ministers to this Summit. It is indeed vital that they be fully associated with your forthcoming commitments to basic education.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The international community has already promised its support, and a number of initiatives to lend substance to that support are already under way.

With regard to UNESCO, its role as lead agency in the follow-up to Dakar consists notably of maintaining the political momentum, fostering partnerships at the international level and ensuring that the efforts of each participant in this joint undertaking – the countries involved, multilateral and bilateral development partners and civil society – are appropriately linked at both the international and national levels.

UNESCO has been performing this role in various ways during recent months.

I have been at pains personally to establish and consolidate strategic alliances. Before and after Dakar, I increased my contacts with ministers of education and the presidency of the G8 countries. The Okinawa Communiqué adopted by the G8 Summit last July thus brought vigorous support to the Dakar Framework for Action, confirming in particular the commitment of the G8 to countries seriously determined to work towards Education for All. I also initiated a dialogue with the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), appealing to donor countries for a substantial increase in the funds allocated to basic education under official development assistance.

In this context, UNESCO has drawn up a preliminary draft financing strategy designed to increase the flow of international aid for Education for All, which I shared first with DAC and then with other multilateral and bilateral partners. The discussion under way on the rationalization of funding flows for basic education is very encouraging. It should raise the awareness of all the partners and help improve arrangements for assistance planning, statistical evaluations, monitoring of achievements and coordination among the donors.

Similarly, the guidelines for the preparation of national plans of action, which we drew up and which were the fruit of wide-ranging discussion with various partners involved in Education for All at international and national levels, will prove to be, I hope, useful for the countries involved in this effort.

Besides these initiatives designed to improve the organization of follow-up to Dakar, a number of operational activities have been undertaken to encourage the concerted efforts at both international and national levels. The seminar that UNESCO will hold here in Bamako, a few days from now, in collaboration with the World Bank and other partners, will in fact be devoted to identifying, evaluating and highlighting the contribution of civil society to basic education in Africa.

National capacity-building, through institutional development and leadership training, in collaboration with other partners, is also at the heart of UNESCO's concerns. It is true that there is a need for many skills, in some cases sorely lacking at the local level, in order to design and implement policies adapted to each specific context: preparation of action plans, sectoral analyses, collection and use of statistics, training of teaching personnel, curriculum development and production of teaching materials.

The *observatory* established within the UNESCO Institute for Statistics should enable us to be more effective in gauging progress accomplished in the light of the pledges made at Dakar. It will also help us to identify areas where rapid corrective measures must be taken.

You can clearly see that the follow-up to Dakar is at the very heart of UNESCO's programmes. Our Executive Board gave me its unqualified support in this regard. Indeed, while the follow-up to Dakar concerns education first and foremost, it also involves all the Organization's other fields of competence, in an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses culture, communication, information and science.

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The time has come to turn our dreams into reality, and to adopt dynamic and innovative strategies to respond to the immense challenges facing Africa. It is my belief, undoubtedly shared by you, that one of the most powerful weapons in this combat is education.

It is in the first place, and above all, to the countries themselves, and therefore to you, supreme leaders of these States, that falls the heavy task of attaining the objectives set at Dakar. There are many partners to help you in this effort. The international community is very receptive to your proposals and is already taking steps to consolidate and harmonize its assistance.

So now is the time to focus all our energy, all our resources, all our knowledge and all our skills on the development of an approach to education based on a fruitful partnership, on shared ideals and on a culture of peace, diversity and mutual respect.

Before concluding, I must express my great satisfaction at the large-scale mobilization of your countries on the occasion of the International Year for the Culture of Peace. The highly innovative programme of education for a culture of peace and human rights that you have launched, Mr Konaré, in this country which welcomes us so warmly today, is exemplary on more than one score, and I hope that it will set an example to be widely followed throughout the continent.

The conference that brings us together today is of great importance for UNESCO. The relevance of your decisions today will determine the economic and social well-being of future generations. Allow me, therefore, to express the profound hope that this meeting will culminate in proposals that reflect a clear, global vision of the future. UNESCO is and will always be at your side.