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Address by
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(UNESCO)

at the Closing Ceremony of the General Constitutive Conference for the creation
of the Forum of African Parliamentarians for Education (FAPED)

Dar-es-Salaam, 2 December, 2002

Honourable Chairman,
Honourable Chief Minister of Zanzibar,
Honourable Ministers,
Mr Acting Chairperson of the African Union Commission,
Honourable Speakers,
Honourable Members of Parliament,
Members of the UN family and Development Partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues and Friends,

It is a great honour for me to be with you at the closure of this conference, which has brought to fruition the work undertaken over the past year. The creation of the Forum of African Parliamentarians for Education (FAPED) is of high importance for all our efforts to develop education in Africa, especially Education for All (EFA). I would like, therefore, to pay tribute to the Speakers of the National Assemblies of Mauritius and Senegal, who have been the main initiators of this project. I also would like to thank the Government and the people of Tanzania for agreeing to host the General Constitutive Conference and for their warm hospitality. I commend the tireless action of the Contact Group and all those whose inputs have helped to bring FAPED into being.

Parliamentarians are among UNESCO's most important partners, to whom we look for support and cooperation as we endeavour to fulfil our mission. We look forward to helping you, in turn, through the provision of information and expert advice, through our networks of international cooperation, and through our standard-setting activities.

Naturally, I am very pleased that UNESCO has helped to facilitate the emergence of FAPED. That support will continue in the follow-up to this constitutive conference, not least because the Executive Secretariat of FAPED will be housed at UNESCO BREDIA in Dakar, Senegal. The further strengthening of our cooperation with FAPED in the period ahead is an exciting prospect and one which I fully support.

There are many dimensions of the role of parliamentarians regarding education, the scrutiny and passage of educational legislation being the most obvious. Other aspects include the debate of educational policies, reforms and plans; the voting of budgetary allocations to education; the oversight of educational expenditures and service delivery; the mobilization of resources for education; advocacy on behalf of national and local educational needs; and, on some occasions, mediation in educational disputes.

No doubt these several facets of parliamentarians' engagement with education have figured prominently in your deliberations during this conference. Over and above these particular actions and functions, however, are two fundamental challenges that parliamentarians must address if they are to make a real difference.

First, there is the challenge of leadership. In the Dakar Framework for Action, much emphasis is placed on the importance of political will in order to drive forward the EFA agenda in each country. Without real political will, too often we are left with eloquent but empty pledges, promises that are never kept. To be effective, this political will must come from the highest levels of the state and must be expressed through the key institutions of national governance. Legislatures and parliamentarians, at all levels, are integral parts of this leadership. By strengthening the role of parliamentarians through FAPED and other means, political will is also strengthened, which is a pre-condition for translating educational commitments into actions. The creation of FAPED sends a signal to your own populations concerning the importance you attach to education. At the same time, it tells bilateral and multilateral development partners that there is increased determination to seriously address the education agenda of your countries.

Second, there is the challenge of building consensus. This is indeed a challenge due to the tendencies towards partiality, disagreement and rivalry in the political realm. For the sake of education, these tendencies have to be faced and overcome. Political will is stronger when it can draw upon broad-based agreement on educational priorities and tasks. In addition, education is not a short-term process, nor can it thrive if it is constantly pushed and pulled in different directions. The commitments to education need time and continuity in order to proceed towards successful completion. Consequently, a broad national consensus on education is desirable, one which can be sustained over many years.

One implication of this is the need to protect education against some of the turbulence of everyday politics. Sustained educational expansion and improvement cannot easily be achieved if they are subject to sudden reversals and changes. Education is one area of public policy where, at least on the fundamentals, there should be general agreement. I believe that parliamentarians should seek common ground wherever they can. They should actively cultivate consensus. This consensus, of course, is not to be confined to the political elite but should be cultivated within the whole society. The involvement of civil society organizations, the private sector and local communities in all aspects of educational policy-making and practice is an essential dimension of consensus-

building, and parliamentarians can and should play an important role in encouraging this.

The harnessing of political will and consensus is vital if Africa's educational needs and challenges are to be met. With regard to basic education, those needs have been vividly revealed by the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2002, which informed the meeting of the High-Level Group on EFA held in Abuja, Nigeria, two weeks ago. According to the Report, at current rates of progress 28 countries are at serious risk of not achieving any of the three measurable Dakar goals by 2015 (these goals relate to universal primary education, gender equality and adult literacy). Twenty countries in sub-Saharan Africa fall into this category. In addition, a further 43 countries are unlikely to achieve at least one of the three measurable EFA goals; of these, fourteen are found in sub-Saharan Africa. By any measure, this is a sobering scenario.

To properly understand these figures, however, it is necessary to recognize that the Monitoring Report's assessment is not a firm prediction. Instead, its assessment is conditional in character since it is based on 'current rates of progress'. Therefore, one must not be fatalistic in the face of statistics. Their purpose, in fact, is to alert us to the likely outcome if suitable measures are not taken. In other words, the Report's conclusions should be seen as an inducement to action.

The entire EFA agenda, agreed two and a half years ago at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, was strongly shaped by the quantitative and qualitative challenges facing African education. In quantitative terms, improved access to and completion of primary education, especially for girls, are inadequate in many African countries. In qualitative terms, much needs to be done to make curricula more relevant and up-to-date, to ensure the supply of enough teachers trained to a good standard, and to cultivate values and attitudes conducive to peace, democracy, mutual understanding and sustainable human development.

EFA, of course, extends beyond formal schooling to also embrace adult literacy, non-formal education, and lifelong learning. The forthcoming UN Literacy Decade (2003- 2012), which UNESCO will lead, will provide a framework for cooperation and enhanced efforts aimed at reducing illiteracy rates, especially in Africa and especially among African women.

Today and for the foreseeable future, educational development in Africa cannot be addressed without reference to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Through its direct impact on teachers, parents and pupils and on the very functioning of

education systems, especially at the local level, this epidemic makes existing educational problems worse and more intractable. Social cohesion, economic development and political stability in several African countries are being rendered vulnerable by HIV/AIDS. In my view, it is vital that Africans challenge fellow Africans to face up to the HIV/AIDS crisis. In this regard, the priority given to HIV/AIDS in the Africa-led NEPAD initiative is particularly significant. For its part, UNESCO is placing strong emphasis on HIV/AIDS preventive education in its programmes and activities in Africa.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Throughout the world, parliamentarians are key forces for promoting peace, democracy and sustainable human development for all. These are the values of the United Nations and of UNESCO, values which legislators defend and promote in each national context. UNESCO's cooperation with the parliamentary community rests upon the desire to strengthen alliances which will increase the participation of all political and civil society actors in decision-making processes. Our close dialogue with parliamentarians in Africa and elsewhere is predicated on a broad platform of action designed to ensure that globalization brings real benefits to all, especially the poor and the excluded.

In recent times, we have witnessed some developments in Africa which inspire hope despite the continuing and, in some cases, deepening problems facing the continent. The formation of the African Union is a major political advance with far-reaching consequences for the promotion of peace, cooperation and integration. Similarly, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) looks set to become the Africa-led framework that was so badly needed in the past. NEPAD aims to achieve sustainable development on the primary basis of African leadership, African initiative and African responsibility, complemented by support and cooperation from development partners.

By incorporating the main international development goals agreed in recent years, as encapsulated in the Millennium Declaration, NEPAD provides a common agenda for Africa's development that is consistent with international commitments. The support of legislators for the NEPAD initiative took shape in the meeting in Cotonou, Benin, which saw the creation of the Forum of African Parliamentarians for NEPAD. In view of the priority that NEPAD gives to human resource development and education, the actions of the Parliamentarians for NEPAD and those of FAPED are clearly complementary. I am sure that collaboration between these forums will bring many benefits.

In conclusion, I would like to repeat my congratulations to you all for having created FAPED. Rest assured that UNESCO will continue to work closely with you in pursuit of our shared goals. The test of our collaboration will be measured by the results we achieve. I am confident that UNESCO and FAPED, through our work together and with other partners, can advance the cause of education in Africa. It remains for me to wish you every success in the implementation of the FAPED and a safe journey back to your countries.

Thank you.