

DG/2006/009
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Koichiro Matsuura

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the High-Level Forum
of the United Nations Environmental Management Group

To be delivered on his behalf by Walter Erdelen
Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences

Geneva, 24 January 2006

Mr Chairman,
Executive Heads of Agencies and Executive Secretaries of Multilateral
Environmental Agreements,
Vice-Chair of the UN High-Level Committee on Programmes,
Chairman, UN Energy,
Chairman, Inter-Organization Programme for the Sound Management of Chemicals,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO welcomes this opportunity for high-level presentations and discussions on developments related to the Environmental Management Group or 'EMG'.

UNESCO is in full agreement with the rationale for having this meeting, namely, the enduring need for cooperation and synergistic arrangements between United Nations Specialized Agencies and Programmes. This collaboration is necessary in order to maximize the positive impacts of their programmes and to avoid duplication, for the benefit of individual Member States and the international community as a whole. Such a need for synergies also applies to action in the area of the environment.

UNESCO agrees that the environment is a matter of concern to all sectors of society. The recently-completed Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, of which UNESCO was a co-sponsor, has clearly demonstrated the linkages between human-induced drivers of environmental change, the degradation of ecosystem services, and subsequent adverse impacts on human well-being. Clearly, if we are to make meaningful progress towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals as well as the targets set up by the multilateral environmental agreements, these current trends towards the degradation and loss of ecosystem services must be reversed.

The new knowledge societies also require synergies among different international actors and agencies. As you are aware, UNESCO has been actively involved in multi-stakeholder dialogues on the role of information and communication technology in addressing the challenge of achieving sustainable development, including in the area of the environment.

In another example, UNESCO has an overarching role in the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), and it has helped to coordinate a whole set of activities at the local, national and international level that have already been designed and launched. The Decade is an important framework for and stimulus to the implementation of activities related to sustainable development, and partnership and the development of synergies among international agencies are crucial to the Decade's success.

The above-mentioned areas of cooperation between international organizations – ecosystem services and well-being, information and communication technology, and education – are examples of what we could do and should do in order to work together more effectively. The list of topics that require such coordinated action for the environment is long and includes, inter alia: the conservation and sustainable use of different forms of diversity and associated traditional or local cultures; maintaining the interlinkages between biological and cultural diversity as complementary assets; the targets established under the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development; and the Millennium Development Goals, including those pertaining to poverty, environmental sustainability and water-related issues.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is against the background of the above-mentioned examples of actual and potential collaboration that UNESCO welcomes your invitation to UNESCO to participate in this high-level brainstorming forum of the Environmental Management Group.

UNESCO's pursuit of dialogue and collaborative programmes and activities with other UN agencies and programmes is conducted bilaterally and multilaterally. For example, UNESCO coordinates a number of mechanisms and programmes for inter-agency cooperation, such as UN-Oceans, the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, and the World Water Assessment Programme, among others. UNESCO is also an active partner in the UNEP Science Initiative and follows developments related to an Environmental Compact with interest. We are equally interested in the current debate on synergies between the multilateral environmental agreements.

However, coordination is never enough when facing the challenge of providing timely and accurate evidence and neutral solutions to tackle environmental issues having enormous implications for people, health, economies, and the sustainability of the environment. The Indian Ocean tsunami disaster in December 2004 is an example of an event that, due to its scale and complexity, has required international coordinated action.

In this context, there can be no doubt that the exchange of information, the integration of priorities, and cooperation between UN bodies and other international organizations must be a priority for all UN Specialized Agencies and Programmes, if international assistance is to provide solutions to the complex challenges faced by humanity in the years to come.

It is in this perspective that UNESCO is pleased to be a member of the Environmental Management Group. We have followed and contributed to the work

of the EMG since its inception. We have already been in contact with Mr Halifa Drammeh, the new Director of the EMG, and with his staff, and I would like to inform you that the first informal inter-agency consultation on coordination between UNEP and UNESCO in the framework of the EMG took place in Paris at the end of 2005. I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Drammeh on his new appointment and to assure him of our support.

Finally, let me inform you that UNESCO concurs that, as anticipated in the working documents, assessing the work of the Environmental Management Group would be very beneficial for ensuring its relevance and effectiveness. The development of a strategic plan to guide the future work of the EMG would also be very appropriate. A more focused and effective EMG would assist with several processes related to inter-agency coordination and cooperation, including the provision of technical backstopping to reinforce UN system-wide coherence in the areas of humanitarian affairs, the environment and development.

I look forward to a very successful meeting.

Thank you, Mr Chairman.