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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

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 the South and South-East Asia Science Policy Forum**

New Delhi, India, 29 November 2007

Mr Minister for External Affairs,
Governor of Haryana and President of the Zaheer Foundation,
Mr Ambassador,
Mr President of ICSU,
Distinguished Scientists,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address this closing ceremony of the South and South-East Asia Science Policy Forum, which has focused on the important issue of capacity-building in science and technology, notably the challenges and opportunities for policy-making.

I wish at the outset to thank the co-organizers for their hard work in making this Forum a success – namely: the Zaheer Science Foundation; the National Institute of Science Technology and Development Studies; the Indian National Science Academy; ISESCO; and the International Council for Science, ICSU.

I am particularly grateful to Professor Kidwai, Governor of Haryana, for taking the initiative two years ago to convene the first South Asia Science Policy Forum, which this year has been expanded to include Member States from the South-East Asia region.

By bringing together policy-makers, outstanding scientists, international organizations and representatives of scientific and academic institutions, this Policy Forum has become a valuable platform for reflection on science and the directions

it needs to take to tackle the urgent challenges facing the citizens of this vast and dynamic region.

The results of this Forum will be important for global science policy forums, such as the biennial Budapest World Science Forum, organized by UNESCO in collaboration with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, ICSU and the European Commission. Earlier this month, I attended the third Budapest Forum, on “Investing in Knowledge, Investing in the Future”. It was a very successful high-level event, with the participation of four Heads of State, and signalled bold new strategies for enhancing the contribution of science to sustainable development.

You will recall that in 1999, UNESCO organized, in cooperation with ICSU, the first World Science Conference in Budapest – the event which gave rise to these biennial Forums. The Conference’s main outcome, the “Science Agenda, Framework for Action”, has been instrumental in determining the path of science policy over the past ten years. In 2009, UNESCO will hold the “The World Science Forum-Budapest- Ten Years After”, again in Budapest at the kind invitation of the Hungarian authorities, to take stock of the progress made in implementing the Agenda over the last ten years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the past two days, you have engaged in intensive discussions, both formal and informal, covering a wide range of fields in which science policy-making and capacity-building play a vital role. These include agricultural production, energy use, water resources management, health services, knowledge societies and the digital divide.

There are four challenges that cut across these fields, which I would like to use this occasion to highlight:

- First: the development of sound science policies;
- Second: the building of human and institutional capacities in science;
- Third: the establishment of knowledge sharing networks in science;

- And fourth: the role of women in science.

Just last month, during UNESCO's General Conference, I convened two Ministerial Round Tables to examine the role of education and science in eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development.

The Communiqués of both events have distributed to you. They underscore the fact that science, technology and innovation are major driving forces for development.

Indeed, increasingly Member States turn to science and technology as a means to reduce poverty and fast track economic growth. The experience of newly industrializing countries such as India shows that this requires a major reform of national science, technology and innovation systems.

What role can UNESCO play in this context?

I have made it a priority, since the beginning of my tenure as Director-General, for the Organization to strengthen its role as an advisor to governments on the development and reform of national science, technology and innovation systems. UNESCO has been very active in this area, providing case by case science policy advice to developing countries and Small Island Developing States.

UNESCO has also been active in helping its Member States integrate sustainable development priorities into their national science policies. We promote good practices for strategic planning and for the evaluation of research and development in science and technology.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you have emphasized in your discussions, a sine qua none for achieving sustainable development through science is the building of scientific capacity.

UNESCO's new International Basic Sciences Programme (IBSP), created in 2005, has adopted science education as one of its "major priority actions". It plays a central role in enhancing scientific capacity through its network of national, regional

and international centres of excellence, as well as through the promotion of South-South and North-South-South cooperation.

UNESCO is also making a very important contribution to capacity development in Member States through its two scientific category I Institutes: the Abdus Salam International Centre for Theoretical Physics (ICTP) in Trieste, Italy; and the UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education in Delft, The Netherlands.

The majority of students at ICTP and UNESCO-IHE are from the developing world and return to their countries upon graduation to work in high-level positions in government, academia and the private sector. Both Institutes have vast networks of alumni throughout the world, including here in South and South-East Asia. In the last biennium alone, ICTP trained some 4,000 scientists. UNESCO-IHE counts close to 15,000 alumni worldwide.

In addition, UNESCO's network of category II centres, which operate under the auspices of the Organization, is very effective in training and building capacity in various scientific fields. In South and South-East Asia, there will soon be four such centres:

- The Regional Humid Tropics Hydrology and Water Resources Centre for South-East Asia and the Pacific in Malaysia, which has been functioning since 1999;
- The Regional Centre for Biotechnology Training and Education in India, which will soon begin its operations;
- And finally, the Regional Centre for Water Management Research in Arid Zones in Pakistan and the International Centre for South-South Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation in Malaysia, which were both approved as category II centres by UNESCO's General Conference last month;

Another clear message of this Forum is the importance of networking for knowledge sharing. Indeed, networking is an efficient and cost-effective way of stimulating innovation and combating the negative effects of brain drain.

Our experience with IBSP has shown that through the establishment of centres of excellence and networks between research groups in major educational and research institutions in the North and counterparts in the South, countries can participate as equal partners and engage in locally strategic but mutually interesting science and technology research projects.

UNESCO also promotes cooperation among universities – “Collaboratories”, as we call them – and with industry via both national and regional partnerships, with partners from the North and the South. Enhancing university-industry cooperation is of particular importance. Here, UNESCO has had some successes that may serve as encouraging examples for the future, such as the Mondialogo Prize for Engineers, co-sponsored by UNESCO and DaimlerChrysler.

The final point I would like to make is the need for science policy to strive for gender equality. Science and technology is still often considered a domain for men. We need, therefore, to encourage governments to support women in this field, and to assist in their training. Women make up over half of the world’s population, yet they are largely under-represented in science, notably at decision-making levels.

Women should be involved in academic hierarchies as directors of universities and empowered as ministers so that they may bring their contribution to bear on policy-making. UNESCO is helping to enhance the participation of women in these areas, notably through establishing UNESCO university Chairs for women in science and technology, and through the landmark “For Women in Science” partnership with L’OREAL, the number 1 cosmetics company in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This Forum has been the occasion for far-reaching discussions on the role of science and science policy in sustainable development. Your recommendations send a strong message on the region’s resolve to place science at the forefront of its political agenda. Rest assured that UNESCO will play its role in disseminating these recommendations to a larger audience, and in particular to the World Science Forum in Budapest in 2009.

Thank you all very much.