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联合国教育、
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**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion
of International Women's Day**

8 March 2007

The past twelve months have witnessed important gains for the rights and empowerment of women and for progress towards gender equality around the world. After the historical election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as President of Liberia – who visited UNESCO on the occasion of International Women's Day last year – Chile also elected its first female President. President Michelle Bachelet proceeded to appoint a government with an equal number of male and female ministers. Since then, several other women have become heads of governments. Jamaica and the Republic of Korea now have their first ever female Prime Ministers. In Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, women have been allowed to vote and stand for elections for the first time.

For its part, UNESCO continues to actively promote gender equality and women's empowerment in all spheres of life, and in particular those of decision-making. This commitment applies to all of UNESCO's domains of action, including its post-conflict strategy and initiatives. For example, UNESCO is working to mainstream gender equality considerations into its Iraq programme as a pilot and good practice case.

This year on International Women's Day, UNESCO will focus on "women peacemakers" by bringing together for an International Round Table a selected number of high-level women involved in peace-building efforts. This theme was chosen because women's organizations and women leaders are doing remarkable work across the world, often under very difficult circumstances, to build and maintain peace in their communities and to challenge the impunity for violence against women. Yet, women are often not part of the formal peace-building

processes at decision-making levels. They remain marginalized in formal processes and under-represented in the security sector as a whole.

To address this challenge, the international community will need to act in a concerted and systematic manner. Advances have been made in understanding the links between gender, development, human rights, peace, security and justice. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on “Women, Peace and Security” reaffirmed the role of women in preventing and resolving conflicts and mandated UN Member States to take steps to increase women’s participation in decision-making. However, endemic discrimination and sexual violence are significant barriers to the implementation of the Resolution.

The daily struggle for survival greatly limits the number of female peace activists. Those who are courageous and capable enough to engage in peace building are an endangered minority, and should be recognized, supported and strengthened.

Despite the emergence of women leaders at the highest levels in different corners of the world, violence against women and girls continues to be one of society’s most pervasive problems. For this reason, the UN has selected “ending impunity for violence against women” as the theme for International Women’s Day in 2007. The UN Secretary-General’s “In-depth study on all forms of violence against women”, which was adopted by the General Assembly on 19 December 2006, notes that violence against women is a violation of human rights and a major impediment to achieving gender equality. It further states that as long as violence against women continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.

In recent years, the incidence of violence against women in armed conflict and post-conflict situations has been increasingly acknowledged and documented. During armed conflict, women experience all forms of physical, sexual and psychological violence at the hands of both State and non-State actors. The scale of discrimination and violence against women in conflict and post-conflict situations – and the impunity with which this violence continues to be committed – are among the central obstacles to peace building processes.

Gender-based violence in schools is another area of profound concern. It is one of the major obstacles to access, retention and success within the school system,

particularly among girls, and puts countries and their development partners seriously at risk of not achieving the education-related Millennium Development Goals and the objectives of Education for All. In order to raise awareness of this issue, and also to help mark the launch of the United Nations World Report on Violence against Children to which it contributed, UNESCO organized in November 2006 a roundtable on school related gender-based violence in the context of EFA. “The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child” is also the priority theme for the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women, which is taking place around International Women’s Day from 26 February to 9 March 2007.

It is clear that we must act at all levels if we are to achieve gender equality throughout the world. International Women’s Day is an occasion to focus on certain key aspects of this important endeavour. This year, we must mobilize the international community to put an end to the culture of impunity that fuels violence against women. This is a critical step not only in our work to promote the rights of women, but to build peace and equality for all.



Koïchiro Matsuura