



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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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 opening of the Plenary Ministerial Forum of the
35th session of the General Conference**

UNESCO, 8 October 2009

Monsieur le Président de la République de Turquie,
Monsieur le Président de la Conférence générale,
Monsieur le Président du Conseil exécutif,
Mesdames et Messieurs les Ministres,
Excellences,
Mesdames et Messieurs,

Nous traversons une période de grande incertitude, marquée par des crises multiples et complexes –énergétique, alimentaire, financière, climatique. S'y ajoute la montée silencieuse de la pauvreté et les inégalités qui se creusent depuis près d'une génération.

Il ne s'agit pas, j'en suis malheureusement convaincu, d'un phénomène passager. Nous courons désormais le risque réel de le voir se transformer en une crise mondiale du développement.

Aujourd'hui, on ne peut plus considérer comme acquis les progrès réalisés depuis dix ans en faveur du développement.

Les chiffres sont alarmants. La récession mondiale a déjà rejeté cent millions de personnes de plus sous le seuil de l'extrême pauvreté. La faim fait des ravages et la mortalité infantile est repartie à la hausse. Les victimes de cette crise sont les plus vulnérables, les plus faibles, et il est d'autant plus nécessaire que l'Afrique et l'égalité des genres restent nos priorités majeures.

Une réflexion commune s'impose, au plus haut niveau, sur les origines, les manifestations et les répercussions de la crise dans les domaines qui sont ceux de l'UNESCO – l'éducation, les sciences, la culture, la communication et l'information.

Je me réjouis que cette première édition du Forum Ministériel Plénier, qui marque une innovation dans l'organisation de la Conférence générale, nous en donne l'occasion.

A cet égard, je tiens à remercier les ministres et les personnalités qui ont accepté d'introduire et de modérer vos échanges tout au long de cette journée.

Je veux rendre tout particulièrement hommage à Son Excellence Monsieur Abdullah Gül, Président de la République de Turquie, qui nous fait l'immense honneur d'ouvrir les débats ce matin.

Les thèmes qui vous sont proposés, sur les moyens d'investir pour sortir de la crise dans les domaines de l'UNESCO, et sur le rôle spécifique de l'Organisation dans la poursuite des objectifs internationaux de développement, contribueront à nourrir notre réflexion et orienter notre action dans le cadre du Programme à venir.

Mr President,

While the precise impact of the crisis - including on the level of Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows – remains to be determined, it is affecting all countries.

In Africa especially, a global priority for UNESCO, the significant danger is that the continent will suffer disproportionately. And as we know, in times of hardship, it is women and girls who suffer first. We must avoid the pitfalls of the 1980s recession, when a reduction in investment hit the social domains.

UNESCO, as the rest of the UN, is monitoring closely the impact of the crisis on all its fields of competence. We intend to pursue these efforts and to bring our findings to the attention of governments, policy makers, and key donors.

Consider education, for example. Spending on education is one of the best investments a country can make. Research shows that each extra year of schooling increases GDP per capita by 4 to 6 percent.

Two UNESCO surveys launched earlier this year show a mixed picture of what is happening. In some middle-income countries, counter-cyclical measures aimed at stimulating the economy are having positive effects on education, for example through investment in school building projects. And Egypt has voted a budget that increases expenditure on education by 15.5 percent this year over last. Yet, other countries are showing negative trends: teacher recruitment is being frozen; and development budgets for elementary education, literacy and early childhood education are being cut.

My experience at the head of UNESCO over the past 10 years has convinced me that there is a direct link between investing in knowledge and accelerating development. Indeed, this was the premise on which UNESCO was founded.

This crisis must not become a development crisis, rolling back years of investment in social sectors and soft infrastructures such as education, science, culture and communication. We believe that this is a time not only to preserve the gains made, but actually to increase investment in core areas.

That is why I wrote to G20 leaders ahead of their meeting in London on 2 April to argue for increased investment in the knowledge-based social domains as the key to sustainable recovery, social cohesion, prosperity and peace. Their communiqué - and that of the UN Chief Executives Board meeting here at UNESCO a few days later - recognized the need for continued investment in these domains.

I also personally urged G8 leaders to foster greater investment in education, and was pleased that - in their final Declaration, adopted in L'Aquila, Italy, on 10 July - they reaffirmed the right to Education for All and the 6 Dakar goals. I quote: "investing in education and skills development is crucial for a sustainable recovery from the current economic crisis and for long term development". End of quote.

Committing to resolving the crisis must also mean renewing our collective engagement in the multilateral system, for there can be no sustainable and effective response without international cooperation.

With 5 years left to the target date for achieving internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and Dakar EFA Goals, we need to look hard at our approaches for doing so.

This must include a renewed commitment to development aid, over and beyond debt relief. While donors have made significant efforts in recent years to increase ODA levels, the stark reality is that it remains insufficient; is imbalanced in favour of a few countries; does not target enough those most in need; and still does not count some vital activities. For example, normative and standard-setting activities, and much of UNESCO's work in culture, are not counted as contributing to development by the OECD/DAC.

As Director-General of a UN specialized agency, let me also note that the generation-long trend to maintain the budgets of UN organizations at a near zero-nominal growth is seriously hampering our collective ability to assist developing countries. This situation is of great concern to all UN organizations.

Mr President,

This Forum is a double opportunity. It is an opportunity to advocate the need to increase investments in and through education, science, culture, communication. It is also an opportunity for you to tell us how UNESCO can best carry out its mission in the coming years, particularly what type of engagement from UNESCO can have greatest impact? What sort of specialist policy advice and capacity building could benefit you most?

In your debates, we would like to hear your assessment of the impact of the crisis on your country and what it means in terms of meeting the challenges of the internationally agreed development goals. For example, your discussions on the full spectrum of our educational agenda could really help to support our actions and reinforce UNESCO's position vis à vis its partners and stakeholders.

Your inputs will also be particularly important concerning UNESCO's action in other key domains, including science, technology and innovation policies; the management of freshwater and the oceans; ethical norms and social transformations; the promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity; the building of knowledge societies; and post-conflict and post-disaster situations.

We also expect to benefit from your exchanges on the perspectives, challenges and opportunities arising from UNESCO's role as a specialized agency within a reforming United Nations system. How can we ensure ownership for national

responses in key domains and harness the potential of South-South and North-South-South cooperation?

I invite you to debate in a very open and interactive manner, and to be bold in your recommendations. You may be sure that I will follow your debates with great interest. I therefore wish you every success and thank you very much for your attention.