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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

UNESCO and Media and Information Literacy

The United Kingdom National Commission for UNESCO

Roundtable on Media Literacy

**Address by
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H. E. Mr Matthew Sudders, UK, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO,
Professor William John Morgan, Chairperson UK National Commission for UNESCO (tbc),
Mr Tim Williams, Deputy Chair of the Board, UK National Commission for UNESCO,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is always a delight for me to speak on issues relating to media and information. Therefore, I wish to thank Mr Tim Williams, Chair of the Communication and Information Committee for inviting UNESCO to share our perspective on media and information literacy in this Media Literacy Roundtable. I said media and information literacy (MIL) with a particular purpose, which I will explain later in these remarks.

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is appropriate for me to commence by saying that UNESCO has been deeply involved in actions to boost MIL having founded the Grünwald Declaration of 1982 which recognized the need for political and educational systems to support citizens' understanding and participation in media and communication. Our focus and commitment to this international instrument was reaffirmed in 2007 through the UNESCO Paris Agenda - Twelve Recommendations for MIL. Complementarily, UNESCO was also instrumental in the birth of the Alexandria Proclamation of 2005

which underscored the central place of information literacy in lifelong learning. Taken together, these have contributed to a foundation and impetus to international action on MIL.

In this Roundtable you have decided to focus on media literacy which historically, has been treated as a different field from that of information literacy. Two main schools of thoughts have contributed to this notion. On the one hand, some advocates consider information literacy as the broader field of study with media literacy subsumed in it. On the other hand, some opposing these arguments propose the converse where media literacy is seen as the primary field of study which covers information literacy.

UNESCO believes that these are just two sides of the same coin. We support the idea that in order to enhance citizens' knowledge and understanding of media and information systems, media literacy and information literacy must be complementary. We hope that by harmonizing these terms into Media and Information Literacy (MIL), the debate can gradually be resolved leading to enrichment of the discipline. Therefore, MIL should be seen as a whole which includes a combination of competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) and concerned with giving people an understanding of the importance of media and information systems to :

- a) participate effectively in the information and knowledge societies,
- b) make informed decisions,
- c) learn about the world around them,

- d) build a sense of community,
- e) maintain public discourse and,
- f) engage in life-long learning.

Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to freedom of expression.... And to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas regardless of frontiers.” It is UNESCO’s strong belief that MIL equips citizens with the competencies necessary to acquire the full benefits of these rights because at the heart of it lies the need to empower people with the essential understanding of the function of media and information systems in their personal lives and in democratic societies, under what condition these functions can be performed and how citizens can critically evaluate the quality of the content provided.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

MIL is, therefore, one of the key strategies of UNESCO’s Communication and Information Sector. We are currently working in three main initiatives:

The first action is the preparation of a **Model Curriculum on Media and Information Literacy for Teacher Education**. This curriculum is a tool that will provide educators, of all backgrounds, with the main competencies on MIL. By training educators, we are ensuring that this group which exerts a greater influence on societies' education is equipped with the knowledge, skills and tools necessary to pass-on to students. This is vital in achieving a potential multiplier effect. That is to say – media and information

literate teachers should lead to media and information literate students and consequently media and information literate societies.

The next step is to partner with government, teacher-training institutions and other stakeholders to adapt and integrate the curriculum into teacher education. Expressions of interests are welcome.

Integral to the curriculum's success is to ascertain the actual skills levels in MIL, the required enabling environment to achieve this and the need for continuous assessment and monitoring of these at the national level. This has led to our second initiative, which is the development of a **Global Framework of MIL Indicators**. At the first international expert group meeting, convened earlier this month, the draft indicators were reviewed and recommendations made for their improvement. The meeting brought together experts from a wide range of domains, including media, information, education, curriculum development, psychometrics and statistics. Seventeen (17) countries from all regions of the world were represented during the meeting. We have prepared a Plan of Action for the further development of **the Draft Global Framework of Indicators** and are projecting to pilot the MIL indicators in at least six countries during the first quarter of 2012 *[My colleague, Alton Grizzle, who is here today, is prepared to share more details on these initiatives as the roundtable proceeds].*

UNESCO is keen to help governments develop national policies on MIL. To this end, we have begun by partnering with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and the European Union to publish a book entitled *Mapping Media Education (MIL) Policies in the world*. It is by no means exhaustive but is quite useful as it examines policy and operational issues relating to MIL in sections of Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America. Over the next year and beyond, UNESCO will be working with multi-stakeholder groups to develop national strategies and policies on MIL with a view to including these as part of existing national information or ICTs policies/strategies.

The final action I wish to share with you before closing is related to research. We want to ensure that our actions in the field of MIL and recommendations to our Member States are informed by research. Among the research initiatives spearheaded and supported by UNESCO is the recent cooperation with the United Nations Organisation/Alliance of Civilization (UNAoC) to establish the first international network of universities which will collaborate on research in the field of MIL. The facilitation of networking among higher education institutions will also enable the promotion and exchange of knowledge of MIL. This, our third strategy, will commence with 8-10 universities from different regions and will expand gradually to other universities. This project has been in the pipeline for some time but will be launched in January 2011.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There is positive evidence that more and more countries are recognizing the need for MIL and are taking steps to address this.

The decision of the European Parliament to make media [and information] literacy compulsory at all education levels is one such indication. Therefore, UNESCO is exploring the possibilities to launch a **United Nations International MIL Day** which will help raise awareness of the importance of MIL. I wish to underscore the point that we are at the beginning of the brainstorming process to determine the suitability of such an international day. You may recall that not long ago President Barack Obama declared a national information literacy day in the United States of America.

It is through international cooperation that MIL initiatives will be strengthened around the world.

In closing, I wish to recognize some of our partners, including the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association (CBA), the UN Alliance of Civilizations; NORDICOM/the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media; Göteborg University; the Salzburg Academy on Media & Global Change, Association of Media Literacy – Ontario; World Summit on Media Children and Youth; Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union and the Argentina Ministry of Education – and many others.

As we move forward it is crucial that all stakeholders, young people, parents, adults, schools, the media and information industry, governments and all others be engaged in foregrounding media and information literacy on the development agenda.

It is also necessary to consider the issue of North-South and South-South cooperation towards global take-up of media and information literacy, to ensure that poorer countries are not left behind. We should be mindful and guard against the path that resulted in the so-called “digital divide”.

I hope that you will have productive discussions and outcomes.

Thank you