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Address by
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of the United Nations Educational,
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(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the Extraordinary Session
of the Intergovernmental Council of the MOST Programme

UNESCO, 19 October 2005

Mr Chairman of the Intergovernmental Council,
Honourable Minister of Social Development of South Africa,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to the opening of this extraordinary session of the Intergovernmental Council of the Management of Social Transformations (MOST) Programme.

The holding of this meeting right before the end of the 33rd session of the General Conference is an opportune moment to take account of the reform and strengthening of the governance structure of MOST in its Phase 2, which started in January 2004.

This morning's session contributes to fulfilling the commitment of Member States and the Secretariat to interact much more frequently and to consult extensively on all new moves the Programme is taking.

Last night, 17 Member States were newly elected to join the MOST Intergovernmental Council; my congratulations go to them all. I also would like to convey my gratitude for the lively interest in and support to MOST that many Member States have expressed during the last IGC meeting and in Commission III of this General Conference.

It was indeed at the last two statutory sessions of the Intergovernmental Council, in 2003 and in 2005, that you provided the MOST programme with a set of clear recommendations on how to concentrate and re-focus on its core business. By working specifically towards strengthening the ties between research in the social sciences and decision-making, MOST is now seeking to promote a culture of evidence-based policy formulation at national, regional and international levels.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the outgoing IGC President, Professor Arie de Ruijter from the Netherlands, for his outstanding guidance during the first years of MOST Phase 2; your contribution has been most constructive and helpful in this transitional period. I would also like to thank the outgoing Vice-Presidents of the IGC Bureau who have worked so conscientiously, in liaison with the Secretariat, to establish the orientation of MOST. I naturally wish that the imminent elections to the MOST presidency and the membership in the IGC Bureau go smoothly.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The world today is in the midst of a knowledge revolution. But what kind of knowledge is needed? Knowledge for what and for whom? The first question entails scrutinizing concepts, models and methods which guide the interpretation of the world. The second question raises the issue of the relevance of social knowledge to the challenges of our times. There is a growing awareness that effective policy-making requires a solid socio-economic and cultural knowledge base; and there is a clear demand for evidence from social science research.

MOST, positioned at the international crossroads between the social sciences and policy development, has the purpose of providing decision-makers at all levels with relevant data and quality research results. This international platform is an important responsibility for UNESCO. The fact that it combines international, comparative, interdisciplinary and policy-related dimensions gives it a distinctive character. In addition, MOST's work is clearly based on an ethical stance, namely, that all of MOST's research is to be conducted "with" and not "on" nation states and their communities.

Underpinning all of these considerations is a fundamental aspect of UNESCO's mission in the area of the social sciences – the centrality of certain key values, particularly the universal values of justice, freedom and human dignity. In this age of accelerating globalization, the ability of the social sciences to retain a vision grounded upon universal ideals is vital. After all, while it is important for policy-making to be based on informed input, it must also be recognized that policies and decisions are rooted in values and an ethical vision, not just of how the world is but also what it might become. Our purpose is to enhance the chances that the values informing UNESCO's mandate also inform the policies of governments and other bodies.

In association with UNESCO's role as an 'honest broker', as a capacity-builder, as a convener, and as a clearinghouse of ideas and good practices, the MOST Programme has real potential to add a distinctive dimension to the social science research/policy-making nexus. Your active engagement with this process is essential for its success.

Thank you.