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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Koichiro Matsuura

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the signature of a Cooperation Agreement
between UNESCO and Microsoft

UNESCO, 17 November 2004

Mr Bill Gates,
Members of the Microsoft team,
Mr Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you, Mr Gates, and your team to UNESCO House to mark the signing of a Cooperation Agreement between UNESCO and Microsoft.

I also extend a warm welcome to Mr Hans-Heinrich Wrede, Chairman of UNESCO's Executive Board, Ambassador Louise Oliver, the Permanent Delegate of the United States of America to UNESCO, and the members of the press.

I am delighted that Microsoft today joins the long list of partners with whom UNESCO has established excellent cooperation over past years. They include, to name but a few, L'Oréal, DaimlerChrysler, Hewlett Packard, Suez and Intel. Microsoft's joining of UNESCO's family of partners is another excellent example of responsible corporate citizenship.

While I appreciate that some people may have questions about UNESCO's partnership activities with private sector enterprises, I believe that such partnerships are both necessary and desirable. In addressing the enormous challenge of the digital divide, UNESCO has anchored its approach upon its ethical mandate and principles. Today, I see it as a positive sign that Microsoft is joining forces with UNESCO. I believe that this partnership is a tangible acknowledgement of the value of UNESCO's approach.

The Member States of UNESCO through its governing bodies and the international community at the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva have called for joint efforts by all relevant actors to reduce the digital divide. UNESCO recognizes that it can be neither effective nor efficient by acting alone. It is therefore pursuing a policy of active and constructive engagement with the private sector, civil society, professional associations and governments in order to find solutions adapted to real needs. This partnership with Microsoft is a joint venture between an ethically-based approach and high-level technical know-how. For UNESCO, it offers one way in which its vision can be put into practice.

The digital divide is one of the greatest obstacles to the fulfilment of UNESCO's key mandate to help create, share, disseminate and preserve knowledge. These are also the elements needed to achieve UNESCO's vision of building inclusive and equitable knowledge societies.

To ensure that all can benefit from information and knowledge, many of UNESCO's activities focus on empowering communities, mainly in developing countries, through the use of ICT. To this end, UNESCO will continue to give strong support to the development of free and open source software for extending and disseminating human knowledge. UNESCO will also continue to promote the use of community approaches to software development.

Since the huge challenge of accelerating access to ICT and knowledge requires an urgent and commensurate response from key actors, UNESCO values the possibilities offered by all software models and advocates a diversity of choice. This is in keeping with the World Summit in Geneva, which recognized that both commercial and open source solutions can help increase access by users and enable them to develop solutions which best meet their needs.

The partnership that we are formalizing today recognizes that Microsoft has developed many innovative tools to share and enhance access to knowledge. It also illustrates the global strategic partnership advocated by the United Nations, a partnership that is desperately needed to fight poverty and exclusion.

Initially, UNESCO and Microsoft will work together in eight areas. The area of education and training is particularly crucial to UNESCO given its mandate to foster education for all (EFA). Hence our interest in the innovative use of technology, which can revolutionize individual student learning. Hence also our interest in harnessing ICT to train the millions of teachers needed in the years ahead; the project on developing a "Teacher Training Syllabus" will set standards to raise the quality of teacher training regarding how to integrate ICT into classroom practices.

Other areas include a capacity-building project on "community access and development" focused on youth in Arab States in North Africa as well as the nurturing of web-based communities of practice, aptly named "knowledge communities".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I invite you to celebrate with us this strategic partnership that will help realize the vision of sustainable, inclusive and equitable global development.

Mr Gates, the floor is yours.