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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the World Conference
for the UNESCO Clubs Movement

UNESCO, 18 July 2005

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to address you at this opening of the World Conference for the UNESCO Clubs Movement. I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all, most especially to the representatives of the UNESCO Clubs movement from countries in all parts of the world.

As you are aware, the United Nations is celebrating its 60th anniversary this year. Sixty years ago, 50 countries signed the United Nations Charter in San Francisco. In November, UNESCO will also celebrate a 60th anniversary, that of the adoption of the UNESCO Constitution. The Organization was created in the aftermath of World War II, with the purpose of building peace in the minds of men and women through international cooperation in the fields of education, culture and science. During those 60 years, while remaining true to its foundational values and ideals, the Organization has evolved considerably. For example, today we have 191 Member States, compared with 37 countries that were the initial signatories in London in November 1945.

The UNESCO Clubs Movement has developed hand-in-hand with UNESCO since the establishment of the first UNESCO Club in Sendai, Japan, on 19 July 1947, on the initiative of a young man who deeply sympathized with UNESCO's ideals. According to the results of the survey recently conducted by UNESCO, there are more than 3,600 UNESCO Clubs, which are engaged in a range of activities in the fields of UNESCO's competence in 89 Member States. Over 1400 Clubs are to be found in the Asia-Pacific region, 1200 in Africa, over 600 in Europe and North America, 250 in Latin America and the Caribbean, and over 70 in the Arab States.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Collaboration between UN system organizations and civil society partners is growing day by day, as was recognized in last year's report by the 'Cardoso Panel', the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations-Civil Society Relations set up by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

UNESCO has long been in advance of most other UN agencies when it comes to building relations with civil society but there is no room for complacency: we readily acknowledge that we must do more. Since becoming Director-General almost six years ago, I have recognized how crucial such partnerships are for international organizations like UNESCO. To fulfil its mandate and achieve its goals, UNESCO cannot confine itself to dealings with political leaders, policy-makers and technical counterparts. Its messages must also reach out to civil society and its members whose beliefs, attitudes, behaviour and choices are the bases of peace, development and

justice in the world. But how are we to do this? We cannot hope to contact the millions of people directly and therefore we must rely upon the component organized units within civil society - community groups, voluntary associations, clubs, and various other organizations and networks.

The UNESCO Clubs movement must be seen in this light. As one of UNESCO's most important partners in civil society, the UNESCO Clubs are a distinctive, indeed unique, asset within the UN system.

This reflects the fact that, at meetings of our governing bodies over the years, Member States have reaffirmed their interest in and support for this movement. Indeed, on the occasion of the 171st session of the UNESCO Executive Board (April 2005), in my response to the general debate, I explained to the Board when discussing the visibility of the Organization that, while the fact that the Organization's Director-General happens to be Japanese may be of some help, the visibility of UNESCO is very high in Japan basically because there is an extensive and active network of about 300 UNESCO Clubs in that country.

The involvement of UNESCO Clubs would be of a great value in a range of priority programme areas of the Organization. For example, the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), for which UNESCO is the lead agency, is currently being rolled out through launches at regional and national levels across the globe. "Partnerships and networks" is one of the seven interlinked strategies proposed for the Decade. ESD is for everyone because everyone is a stakeholder. I see potential roles of UNESCO Clubs, complementary to those of governments, non-governmental organizations, and other civil society organizations at national, regional and international levels, as crucial in achieving the goals of the Decade. And this is just one example.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I found it very timely that this Conference will discuss the future of the UNESCO Clubs movement. I am very pleased to see that about 300 representatives from 120 countries are gathered here this morning. As Director-General, it is reassuring to know that the ideals of the Organization are shared and supported by friends of UNESCO like you.

I understand that an extraordinary session of the World Congress of the World Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations (WFUCA) is being held in conjunction with this Conference, aimed at the renewal of this NGO.

As you know, WFUCA was officially founded in 1981. This came three years after the leaders of the UNESCO Clubs movement met at UNESCO Headquarters

and agreed that a federation would help to enhance the coordination and promotion of the movement. In subsequent years, UNESCO worked well with this NGO, whose activities it supported.

Sadly, for a variety of reasons and in conformity with the Organization's directives concerning relations with NGOs, I proposed to the 169th session of the Executive Board in April 2004 that UNESCO's formal associate relations with the NGO should be suspended, on an interim basis. The Executive Board agreed to this action and I am called upon to report back to it on this matter at its 172nd session in September.

I would like to reiterate that UNESCO is committed to continuing its support for the UNESCO Clubs movement. In this connection, I believe that, at the international level, the role of WFUCA is becoming increasingly vital for mobilizing and unifying UNESCO Clubs effectively. It is a fact of some significance that WFUCA is the only NGO that has the Organization's name in its designation.

Therefore, as I stated in my remarks last December to the second meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee for the renewal of WFUCA, I supported the purpose and task of this Committee, namely, to re-examine WFUCA's rationale and to identify its best way forward. I also welcomed the organization of this special international conference for the UNESCO Clubs movement.

In concluding my remarks, I would like to thank the members of the Ad hoc Committee, which has worked hard over the last eighteen months, especially Mr Eiji Hattori, Chair of the Ad hoc Committee, and also all of you who supported the Committee's work.

It remains for me to wish you a positive and fruitful meeting over the next three days.

Thank you.