

*Speech Delivered by His Excellency Mr. Semere Russom, the Minister of Education of the State of Eritrea, at
The 34th Plenary Session of UNESCO (October 16-03 November 2007)*

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UNESCO's General Conference**

***16 October to 03 November 2007
Paris-France***

***Mr. President of the General Conference
Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board
Director General of UNESCO
Distinguished Heads of Delegation!***

Let me on behalf of the Delegation of the Government of Eritrea and myself heartily congratulate you, **Ambassador George Anastassopoulos** of Greece, for your election as President of the 34th General Conference of UNESCO and I am certain that with your leadership this conference will achieve its results. I feel very much pleased and honored to address this august gathering, which UNESCO has to be appreciated and congratulated for bringing minds together to discuss issues that call for utmost attention and implementation. I wish to join you also to cordially congratulate the **re-joining of Singapore**, after 22 years of separation, to the family of UNESCO at this era of globalization.

Mr. President!

To translate UNESCO's noble mission into reality, the need for and role of global communication becomes of paramount importance. We need common and global commitment and perseverance to develop and use **Mother Language** as well as National and global communication to bring this mission home. In line with this, UNESCO (in 1999) had initiated the celebration of an **International Mother Language Day** to be on February 21st every year. In consonance with this, it has been more than a decade since Eritrea had happily welcomed and re-affirmed the role and utilization of a Mother Language, not only in the elimination of illiteracy and promotion of culture of peace, but also in exploiting it as a source of identity and basic right to express one's feelings and opinions best. Therefore, the thrust for the promotion of national and global communication that presupposes **unity in diversity** among peoples, cultures and civilizations of the world becomes categorical.

Mr. President!

Eritrea fully supports the "**Recommendations made by the Executive Board on the Draft Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013**" and the **Major Programme Areas** stated under the **Draft Programme and Budget** for the biennium and notes with great satisfaction UNESCO's dedication in continuously reforming its strategic vision.

I am glad to note that Eritrea is pursuing its development structure and reconstruction efforts by cherishing peace as the option for a bright future. It goes without saying that poverty can be alleviated if peace reigns intra-and internations as well as globally; Peace and security could not be attained while the freedom, rights and sovereignty of the people and their country of origin are at stake or deprivation.

Mr. President!

Eritrea has embarked upon a national programme to entirely reform the Education Sector. Thus, due focus has been given to the expansion and enhancement of tertiary and quality education. Apart from the University of Asmara, five other institutions namely: *Eritrea Institute of Technology(EIT), College of Business and Economics, College of Marine Sciences, College of Agriculture, College of Health Science College of Arts and Social Sciences* have been established. Advanced level of Technical Vocational Education and Training, as part of tertiary education is being encouraged in the country.

In line with the EFA Global Monitoring Report, I am pleased to impart to this plenary session that Eritrea has conducted a **“National Conference on Teachers’ Development and Role in Ensuring Quality of Education”** in early February 2007. At this Conference, the central role of teachers for the achievement of **EFA Goals** has been underscored. To create **noble teachers for a noble profession**, utmost efforts are being made to equip them with professional eligibility and efficiency in order to enable them to instill values and attitudes in the minds of students and thereby to foster tolerance, national unity, peace and respect for religious, ethnic and cultural diversity. However, since reformation of pedagogy and curriculum in the training institutions has been one of the challenges, we call upon UNESCO for the provision of expertise and strengthening of its cooperation to provide quality education for all.

The five-year (2005-2009) Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) which has already been launched and operational is in compliance with global MDG and EFA goals and strategies. The Adult Literacy Programme puts emphasis on women, girls and other disadvantaged citizens and currently a project on Complementary Basic Education is being piloted in line with EFA goal 3. Rural libraries have been established and exclusive

educational radio programmes, which are geared and responsive to the achievement of EFA goals 3 and 4, have been produced and broadcast in various Mother Languages. Eritrea, therefore, pins hope upon UNESCO to play a dynamic role in invigorating the provision of education and life skills training for out-of- school youth.

Mr. President!

The conservation and promotion of culture that consolidates national identity is another concern which Eritrea has been deeply engaged in. Eritrea, as a young African country, has the lofty responsibility to rewrite its ancient history by exploiting its rich and diversified material resources. To this end, the integration of culture into the educational programmes and school curriculum has been deemed necessary for the practicality.

In spite of the fact that Eritrea owns one of the highest densities of archaeological sites in Africa and is one of the few countries of the world that is exceptionally endowed with archaeological remains, some of its ancient, medieval sites and modern heritages have become victims of intentional destruction in the event of war/conflict, not to mention those that get damaged by natural agents or incidental actions.

However, we would like to humbly express our deep gratitude to UNESCO for assigning experts who in cooperation with our local craftsmen helped us to restore two of our national monuments.

Mr. President!

The essential role of **science and technology** as a foundation for sustainable development and for the fight against poverty is well acknowledged. Eritrea, despite its limited resources, has been investing in capacity-building efforts in the basic sciences and science and technology education to address national needs in the areas of agriculture, energy, the environment, health, natural resources development and management, and related activities. In this context, the support that Eritrea receives from UNESCO for the study and mitigation efforts of the consequences of natural hazards like earthquakes and recurrent drought cannot pass without mention.

Water Resource and Environment is also another big concern and efforts are being made to protect the water table by extending soil conservation programmes like terracing and afforestation, to quote some among others. In line with this, Eritrea has been focusing on the consolidation of High School Students' Summer Work Programme, which has been going on for the last 13 years and we have come to witness the fruits of this Programme. Its ecological and economic importance has been vivid and encouraging. There is, of course, dire need for technical and material assistance to make this Programme more productive and sustainable.

Last but not least, I would like to put some emphasis on the need for the development of **Information and Communication Technology (ICT)**. To keep pace with the rapidly changing world, Eritrea supports the international call for bridging the digital divide. Therefore, we request UNESCO to provide us with **material, technical and professional** assistance so that we can equip our schools and the young generation with appropriate knowledge in order to transform themselves and gradually influence the society they live in. Having said this, I would like to finally express my heart-felt wish that this deliberation be successful and fruitful.

Thank you!

