

Speech to be delivered to the 34th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO by the Minister of Education of Ethiopia, Dr. Sentayehu Wolde Mikael, on October 19, 2007

Mr. Chairman of the General Conference
Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board
Mr. Director-General
Distinguished Permanent Delegates
Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, I would like to congratulate you upon your election, Mr. Chairman. I also want to wish you great success in your work and assure you of our full support in your endeavors. My Delegation further wishes to express its high appreciation to the previous Chairman of the General Conference for playing his role admirably. In addition, it is a pleasure for me to pay tribute to the Director-General for his very informative introductory speech. We also warmly welcome the return of Singapore to UNESCO and Montenegro's membership of UNESCO.

Mr. Chairman

One of the core tasks we have at hand is the finalization of the draft Medium-Term Strategy (2008-2013) and the Programme and Budget for 2008-09. Although there are some unknowns, including the full implications of the UN reform, which may require some attention later on, we feel that the draft Medium-Term Strategy is our fundamental strategy document. My Delegation is also firmly behind African Priority, which must be backed up by robust actions that result in concrete outcomes. Moreover, faced with the need to ensure that we have some reasonable budget to continue implementing UNESCO's most cherished goals, including EFA and the MDG's, we appreciate the Director-General's efforts to achieve an increase in budgetary resources of the Organization, and endorse the 631 million dollar budget ceiling for the 2008-2009 biennium.

With respect to Education, my Delegation would like to see intensive activities in terms of improving quality of education at all levels. In addition, a challenge which we are facing - a challenge which other Member States may be confronting as well - concerns policy development and other measures that are needed to properly regulate the dramatic increase in primary school graduates which is posing a serious strain on the provision of secondary and technical/vocational education. We feel that UNESCO should support Member States in this area.

Concerning Culture, one important concern is the situation of world heritages in danger. Although the causes for the problem are varied, many heritages face such risks because of age and climate change. We therefore feel that strategies be developed jointly not just for rectifying the condition of those already in the endangered list but also for preventing deterioration among the others. There should also be greater effort by all concerned to increase nominations for additional inscriptions of world heritages. It is important that the

World Heritage Center work closely with other sectors in these and other matters with structure and authority that is commensurate with its responsibilities.

In the Natural Sciences, we face many challenges. One issue we would like to emphasize is disaster prevention and reconstruction. To us, one of the over-riding challenges in this area is to find ways of dealing with the causal factors, which at least to some degree relate to global climate change. Another area of concern is renewable energy. In this respect, we feel that focus should be made on supporting training and research, particularly through institutes that are closely associated with UNESCO.

We would also like to see the Natural Sciences Sector engage more actively in inter-sectoral activities with the Education and other sectors specially in supporting the development of science teaching materials.

In the Social and Human Sciences, we appreciate UNESCO's effort in promoting intercultural dialogue and social research, particularly as they relate to policy development. We believe that both kinds of efforts can contribute to the development of peace significantly in our region and around the world and therefore need to be strengthened. Concerning policy research, we feel that it is important for UNESCO to assist in promoting the link between research, policy development, and policy evaluation, especially in developing countries.

Regarding Information and Communication, we believe that ICT will be useful, though insufficient, tool for fostering knowledge society. We further feel that greater support to training in ICT comprising not just the technical but also the innovative and ethical use of it is a basic consideration in such efforts. My Delegation also puts special emphasis on inter-sectoral work for improving the professional competence of teachers in the judicious and innovative use of ICT for optimizing the use of ICT in the development of cost-effective courseware or teaching/learning materials, for improving school management and for promoting educational provisions in general. We further stress the significance of sharing of knowledge and technology in an equitable manner through ICT and other means at the global level to narrow the gap between the rich and poor countries.

Moving on to some **general and cross-cutting issues**, we believe that UNESCO should play its roles effectively in its areas of comparative advantage in the UN reform of "Delivering as One" in a way that would actually enhance both its performance and image. We feel that active participation, continuous monitoring, frequent consultations and information exchange are important in the UN reform process, including the pilot projects that are already underway. We are hoping that the Reform will, in actual practice, facilitate program implementation in country priority areas and in the work of the national UNESCO commissions.

We also feel that UNESCO's close relation with **the African Union** should be strengthened. We therefore appreciate very much all actions that the Director-General has been taking along this direction. We also trust that the draft action plan for implementing UNESCO's resolution to expedite the development of science and technology in Africa will get the maximum support by all concerned. My Delegation also trusts that the

Director-General will continue to give attention, as a matter of priority, to recommendations by the UNESCO Committee for NEPAD. The quest for regional integration as pronounced, for example, in the Accra Conference of Heads of State of AU, is something that can serve as a framework in UNESCO's contributions to Africa from the point of the different sectors - Education, Culture, Social and Human Sciences, etc.

We appreciate the close attention the DG and the Secretariat as a whole are giving to **inter-sectoral approach**, but we would like to see this understanding translated into concrete action in a sustainable manner. In this regard, the management of these kinds of activities should be frequently inspected and revitalized.

Mr. Chairman

Let me now very briefly cite some **activities** undertaken by my **Government** in the education and culture sectors.

With respect to Education, in line with EFA and the MDG's, my Government has carried out many activities for the promotion of primary education, gender equality, expansion of educational services, and improvement of educational quality. For instance, primary school participation rate which was 20% some fifteen years back is now 91.6%. Likewise the number of universities has grown from two to 21. Despite the above efforts, however, we still have 3 million school-age children who have not yet got the opportunity of schooling.

Moreover, in the effort to advance EFA, my country is facing a challenge in ensuring that the curricula, teaching methods and teaching materials as well as evaluation approaches are relevant, interactive and up to standard, and that school governance is most suited to enhance the education process. We hope that mechanisms such as UNESCO institutes and the South-South and North-South-South Cooperation in education will contribute importantly to meet these challenges.

In connection with the challenges just mentioned, I would like to mention that we have launched a project, namely the General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQUIP), with its six elements of implementation, to integrate curricula of our schools to the world of work, to instill democratic outlook among students, and to improve school governance.

With respect to Culture, my government, with the involvement of UNESCO, has been engaged in conservation tasks of three world heritage sites, in capacity building which includes training, and in reviewing the cultural policy.

Mr. Chairman

In my concluding remarks, it gives me pleasure to convey that Ethiopia has started the Millennium celebrations on September 12, 2007. This is the year 2000 for us. In this regard, I wish to thank, once again, all Member States, particularly the Africa Group in

UNESCO, as well as UNESCO as a whole for their full endorsement of the Millennium. There are going to be a number of important events marking the Millennium up to September 11, 2008, and the Ethiopian Delegation hopes that we will be honored by the participation of Member States and distinguished personalities of the UNESCO family in the celebrations in Paris and in Addis Ababa.

Thank you.