

ADDRESS BY MR JACOB DICKIE NKATE, MINISTER OF  
EDUCATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF BOTSWANA AND HEAD OF  
BOTSWANA DELEGATION TO THE 34<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF UNESCO  
GENERAL CONFERENCE

Mr President of the 34th Session of the General Conference  
Director General of UNESCO, Mr Koichiro Matsuura  
Distinguished Delegates

I take this opportunity to congratulate you, Mr President on your election to the presidency of this General Conference. The outgoing President of the 33<sup>rd</sup> General Conference deserves our thanks for his good leadership during his tenure of office. I commend the Director General for his commitment in working collaboratively with UNESCO Member States and other United Nations Agencies in driving the UNESCO mandate, ideals and principles.

My delegation is particularly pleased to note the focus UNESCO has placed on Africa in its Medium Term Strategy. The Continent continues to face many daunting challenges, which impede its

effort of meeting the Millennium Development Goals. Concerted action by UNESCO in all its fields of competence can go a long way in alleviating this problem.

I confirm my country's commitment to the realisation of Education for All goals. We have undertaken to have achieved accessible, equitable and quality education by 2016, when Botswana will be celebrating 50 years of independence. We have to date achieved universal ten year basic education although 2 percent of school going age children is not in school. Our transition rate to senior secondary education is 63 percent while our literacy rate is over 81 percent. We intend, going forward, to introduce multi-grade teaching to reach children in the remotest parts of the country who are not in school. Clearly, we are headed in the right direction.

I must indicate that although our effort at achieving universal access to basic education was slowed down somewhat by diverting substantial resources to HIV and AIDS, some consolation can be derived from the fact that we have developed research capacity in HIV and AIDS. We have also developed

support programmes at school and community levels to enhance the quality of life of people living with HIV and AIDS. These programmes have also helped us to sustain access, equity and quality of our education.

We fully support the position expressed by the Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the United Kingdom that countries with viable plans to make primary education universal should be supported. Our plea is that middle income countries with viable plans should not be excluded.

I extend our appreciation to the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) and the Netherlands Government for the long term technical and financial support that they have provided for the SACMEQ research and training programmes. I have no doubt in my mind that these programmes will contribute significantly in our educational development planning and improvement.

Botswana and indeed the African continent cannot achieve sustainable development if adequate attention is not given to development of science, technology and engineering as was indicated by the African Summit on Science and Technology for Development. We also believe that strategies for wealth creation and economic development can be derived from the Science Programme. I welcome UNESCO support of the Addis Ababa Summit decision on science and technology by supporting the implementation of the Consolidated Plan of Action.

I am pleased to state that Botswana is involved in the Sustainable Integrated Management of Arid and Semi Arid Regions of Southern Africa (SIMDAS) flagship Programme. UNESCO has sponsored three PhD students from our sub-region under this programme. Initially the programme was to enrol a student from each of the SADC countries but that has not been possible due to insufficient funds. I thank Member States that supported the inclusion of this programme in the 2008-2009 Draft Programme and Budget.

The University of Botswana and the Department of Geological Survey through the International Geosciences Programme (IGCP) are currently engaged in collaborative research of the Okavango Rift. The project has also established networks with other scientists regionally and internationally to facilitate scientific exchange of researches and experiences. UNESCO support is crucial for sustaining these projects.

Mr President, Botswana is committed to building peace and resolving conflicts. The Centre for Culture and Peace Studies, launched this year, in April at the University of Botswana, is one of the many ways our country contributes towards building a culture of peace. The Centre endeavours to promote peace within Southern Africa and indeed the whole African Continent by integrating all aspects of the African Cultural heritage.

With respect to culture, we recognise the important role played by UNESCO standard setting instruments in the protection and safeguarding of our cultural heritage. To that effect, my country participated in the UNESCO Sub-Regional Meeting on the Convention of the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural

Heritage in 2006, in Tanzania. We also hosted a workshop on the same in July 2007 in collaboration with the Harare Cluster Office. These activities provided awareness and understanding on the processes involved in the ratification of the UNESCO Conventions especially, the 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

However, we would like to see UNESCO paying more attention to preservation of the African Heritage through the increased inscription of World Heritage sites. The Continent is lagging behind in inscribing its sites mainly due to lack of technical and financial capacity to preserve them. It is my firm believe that the African World Heritage Fund will alleviate this problem. I congratulate countries that inscribed their sites on the World Heritage list following the 31<sup>st</sup> Session of the World Heritage Committee in Christchurch, New Zealand.

I would like to reiterate the commitment of Botswana in providing information for all and creating a conducive environment for press freedom and freedom of expression. Our commemoration of the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day and

World Press Freedom Day both held in May this year, is a demonstration of such commitment. Further to that, Botswana in collaboration with the Harare Cluster Office hosted a workshop in June 2007 to raise awareness on the Information for All Programme (IFAP).

In conclusion Mr President, being a small country with limited representation in most multinational organisations, we find the Young Professionals Programme to be of immense benefit to young professionals and their personal development. We hope that with time, we will see more young people from my country represented in the service of the Organisation's ideals and indeed our own.

I thank you for your attention.