



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the Symposium on 'EFA in the Sultanate of Oman:
from access to success'**

UNESCO, 5 December 2006

Honourable Minister of Education of Oman,
Mr President of the General Conference,
Mr Director-General of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States,
Mr Chairman of the Executive Board of the Arab League Educational,
Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO),
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address you at the opening of this important symposium. This initiative, taken by the Sultanate of Oman, signals a clear commitment to achieving the Education for All goals, which are at the heart of UNESCO's mandate. It provides a particularly fitting culmination to the year-long celebration of UNESCO's 60th anniversary.

Let me begin by thanking His Majesty Qaboos bin Sa'id Al 'Bu Sa'id, Sultan of Oman for his devotion to the cause of EFA, both in his own country and beyond its borders.

I would also like to express my thanks and warm welcome to Mr Yahya Bin Saud Al-Sulaimi, the Minister of Education of the Sultanate of Oman, for joining us here this morning.

May I further extend my particular gratitude to Dr. Musa Bin Jaafar Bin Hassan for his great work in organizing this event, and for the deep commitment he has shown to the mission and values of UNESCO during his presidency of the General Conference. Dr Musa presided very successfully last year over the 33rd General Conference. In the intersessional period, he has been working hard to promote UNESCO's work in all fields, and especially in EFA.

Let me finally thank all of our distinguished guests – and in particular the Director-General of the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States and the Chairman of the Executive Board of ALESCO – who have come from near and far to participate in this Symposium. Your presence demonstrates the deep-felt conviction that providing good quality education for all is one of the greatest forces for peace and human development.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The holding of this symposium is most timely, coming as it does just days after the EFA High-Level Group met in Cairo, from 14 to 16 November. This was the first EFA High-Level Group meeting to be held in the Arab region. It took as its special theme the first EFA goal of early childhood care and education, though the Group also addressed other important aspects of the EFA agenda.

I am pleased to report that the resulting Communiqué makes clear and strong commitments to ensure further support for the six EFA goals. It also recognizes the close interdependence between achieving EFA and reaching other international development targets, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The High-Level Group noted the progress that has been made in many regions of the world, as well as the higher profile that EFA has assumed on the international agenda. However, the High-Level Group also warned that without increased efforts a great many countries would not meet the EFA targets by 2015. The numbers of adult illiterates are decreasing only slowly, and in some regions there are not enough teachers to ensure that children in school receive good quality education. It is particularly disconcerting that in 41 countries spending on education has actually decreased between 1999 and 2004. These are all critical issues that require vigorous action now.

The theme chosen for this symposium – “from access to success” – expresses UNESCO’s strategic approach to this challenge. It signals our shared commitment to ensure full and equitable access to educational opportunities for all children and adults, as well as to improve the quality of learning which will lead to success.

Globalization obliges us all to re-assess the kind of education that will best prepare active citizens for knowledge societies. ‘Success’ in basic education must mean, at the very least, acquiring the capacity to take part in and contribute to the networks of communication and knowledge that are the hallmark of today’s global and national communities.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over the next two days we shall address the goals of EFA through the prism of the achievements of the Sultanate of Oman. We shall have the opportunity to explore together this model of EFA progress. We shall also look to other national experiences, with a view to exchanging examples of good policy and practice.

Oman’s own success in promoting quality basic education is evident. May I once again congratulate His Majesty the Sultan of Oman for the commitment he has shown in this area. Over the past 30 years, and under his leadership, Oman has made great advances in EFA. In 1970, Oman had 3 schools with 30 teachers for 900 students, and an adult literacy rate of just 34 per cent. Today, there are 1,046 schools employing 37,500 teachers for nearly 570,000 students, and an 80 per cent adult literacy rate. I have witnessed the rewards of this astonishing progress during my two visits to the country, in March 2001 and December 2002.

The 2007 EFA Global Monitoring Report reveals many further examples of success. All of Oman’s teachers are fully trained – a key element in ensuring that children finish school with usable skills of a high quality. Gender parity in primary education has also been achieved. I am further pleased to observe that the 2006 education budget of Oman manifests an increase of 17 per cent over the 2005 estimate – a striking indication that education is a national priority.

In education, however, we can never become complacent – there are always improvements to be made, in the Arab region, as in other parts of the world. This

event, which showcases progress in Oman, provides a stimulus to the whole region – a chance to share experience, to learn from good practice, and to build on what has already been achieved. It will, I hope, be of particular relevance to the many African countries who are represented here today, and who still face considerable challenges in EFA.

One of UNESCO's key objectives, expressed in the first article of its founding charter, is to harness the potential of education for peace and mutual understanding. In a world where conflict is still all too frequent, I am therefore gratified to know that His Majesty the Sultan of Oman's clearly stated position coincides entirely with that of UNESCO: namely, that learning should aim to promote understanding of one another, of our diverse cultures and traditions, and lead to greater harmony and cooperation among nations. There can be no higher calling than to work hard to achieve these ends.

Moreover, the theme of intercultural dialogue was the focus of the Omani Cultural Days, which UNESCO hosted earlier this year – it is therefore a natural and logical progression to demonstrate, through these two events, the close and mutually supportive links between cultural and educational development.

In closing, I would like to express my satisfaction at the holding of this symposium and congratulate Oman on this important initiative. Your own successes will provide inspiration and guidance for other countries in the Arab region and beyond.

EFA remains, and will remain, a key priority for UNESCO as we work together to reach the six EFA goals by 2015. Over the next two days we will have the chance to learn, not only about examples of progress in EFA, but also about our individual and collective responsibilities in tackling the challenges that still remain.

Thank you.