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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 celebration of World Philosophy Day 2006**

**Sana'a, Yemen, 24 December 2006**

Mr Minister of Higher Education,  
Mr President of the University of Sana'a,  
Professors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen, and dear students,

I am honoured to address you on the occasion of the celebration of World Philosophy Day at the University of Sana'a. It is deeply encouraging to see the growing international recognition of this special Day.

I am delighted to be here again in the Republic of Yemen. Let me extend my gratitude to His Excellency President Ali Abdullah Saleh for inviting me to make this second official visit to his country. I have been privileged to meet his Excellency on several occasions – first at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, then in Aden in 2002 during my last trip to Yemen, and then once again in Paris the following year. Yesterday, we met for the fourth time to discuss our bilateral cooperation in many areas. We noted with great pleasure the progress that has been made in recent years, in particular in education and culture, and addressed plans for further reinforcing our collaboration.

I am also grateful to Mr Abdelqader Bajammal, Prime Minister of Yemen, for giving me such a friendly welcome, first during my visit to the island of Soqatra, famous for its rich biodiversity, and then in his region of Hadhramout, where I had the delight of visiting the historical sites of Chibam, Sayyoun, Tarim, and Al Hajrain.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the people of Yemen for their warm hospitality. Throughout my stay, I have been overwhelmed by the enthusiastic welcome they have given me.

Finally, I would like to extend my thanks to Mr Abdul Salam Mohamed Al Jawfi, Minister of Education and President of the National Commission for UNESCO, who has prepared for me such an interesting programme of visit and has been kindly accompanying me since my arrival. Let me also thank Mr Saleh Ali Ba Surah, Minister for Higher Education and Scientific Research, for joining us here today, and Mr Khalid Tameem, President of the University of Sana'a, for organizing today's event. Earlier this morning, just before joining you, I had the honour of laying with them the first stone of the University's new Museum of Science.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

World Philosophy Day is a particularly important occasion for UNESCO. Since its foundation in 1945, UNESCO has devoted its efforts to building the moral and intellectual foundations for peace. The promotion of philosophy – of independent thought and the free exchange of ideas – has formed an essential part of this work.

In 2002, UNESCO proclaimed an annual Philosophy Day. This was to mobilize greater awareness of the importance of philosophy, and in particular to help draw attention to the crucial role philosophy has to play in helping us face the complex challenges of today's world. In 2004, over eighty Member States celebrated the Day with activities and debates. The decision by UNESCO's General Conference last year to proclaim Philosophy Day a *World Philosophy Day* has given yet further impetus to these efforts. Significantly, this proclamation coincided with UNESCO's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

World Philosophy Day is now a truly world event, as today's celebrations show. Although the Day falls officially on the third Thursday of November, UNESCO encourages activities in support of philosophy throughout the year. We welcome in particular this initiative taken by the University of Sana'a, which promises to give impetus to the teaching of philosophy in Yemen and beyond.

UNESCO, in this context, has published a series of booklets in English and French on Philosophy Day which I am happy to present today to the President of the University and to the students of the Faculty of Arts.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of the oldest and most distinguished of human disciplines, philosophy also remains one of the most powerful tools for coming to grips with the problems of our contemporary world. Philosophy should never be mistaken for simply an abstract practice; it represents a real force for action and change.

Indeed, in today's knowledge societies what could be more relevant than the capacity to analyse and assimilate information, to think creatively, and to expand the limits of understanding? At a time of growing multiculturalism, what could be more valuable than the ability to question received ideas, to penetrate the views of others, and to embrace new perspectives and ways of looking at the world? It is through dialogue and the open exchange of ideas that we can work to bridge the many divides that threaten peace and development.

I know that members of the University of Sana'a share UNESCO's convictions. In 2004, the University organized, in cooperation with UNESCO, a major international symposium on dialogue among cultures and civilizations. Opened by Prime Minister Abdelqader Bajammal, this conference drew attention to the important role of intercultural exchanges in building peace and security. It formed one of a series of high-level regional meetings organized by UNESCO to identify practical strategies for promoting dialogue, in particular in the fields of education, culture and communication.

Today's event contributes yet further to this goal. In particular, it provides an opportunity to honour those very masters of dialogue – that is, the professors and students of philosophy whose responsibility it is to keep the traditions of open thought and debate alive.

I wish to thank and congratulate the organizers of this initiative. It is always a pleasure to see how many active partners UNESCO enjoys across the world. I hope that the great enthusiasm for philosophy manifest here today will continue to grow stronger year by year. I hope that at the University of Sana'a World

Philosophy Day becomes an annual occasion to celebrate and communicate the value of philosophy. And I hope that the debates you engage in here can be expanded to include the full diversity of the world's philosophical traditions. Let me assure you that UNESCO stands ready to support you in all such endeavours.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In conclusion, let me once again thank my hosts for welcoming me here today. I would like to underline how much UNESCO appreciates your commitment to World Philosophy Day, and through this to the values of freedom and respect that the practice of philosophy embodies. Today's event forms part of the great tradition of philosophical debate that has nourished human wisdom across the centuries.

I wish you rich and fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.