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Address by
Mr Koïchiro Matsuura

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

at the 158th session of the Executive Board

Paris, 19 November 1999

Madam Chairperson,
Members of the Executive Board,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with a mixture of deep emotion, great pride and a feeling of humility that I address you today, at the opening of this 158th session of the Executive Board, which is also our first encounter at the beginning of the mandate that the Member States have kindly entrusted to me. We are about to undertake a long journey together under the active and cheerful guidance of Ms Sonia Mendieta de Badaroux. Since we all share the desire to make our Organization more efficient, more vigorous and more harmonious, we will, I am sure, find the way to establish fruitful cooperation based on mutual trust and respect.

At the first session of the Executive Board after the General Conference, it is traditional for the Director-General to welcome the newly elected Members. Being a novice myself, I should first like to greet the Chairperson, the Vice-Chairpersons and all the Members, old and new alike, and to pay tribute to all the representatives of Member States and Members of the Executive Board who, in the recent or the distant past, have helped to shape the soul of this essential constitutional body.

Madam Chairperson,

In recent years, thanks to the efforts of Member States and of my predecessor, UNESCO has succeeded in extending its moral and ethical authority and its role as a world standard in a number of fields. Our Organization must now consolidate its achievements and further strengthen them where necessary. Above all, it must make every effort to ensure that the new policies which have emerged in recent years now become a living reality and part of the everyday action of each of its Member States. The message delivered by the General Conference is plain: the time has come to pass from words to deeds. This is the task to which I intend to devote myself, within the framework of the resolutions adopted by the General Conference and with the benefit of your advice. For this purpose, there is an urgent need to take action on two complementary fronts: on the one hand, to focus attention on the priority programmes - those where the Organization can really "make a difference"; on the other, to increase the vitality, effectiveness and transparency of our work. These are the conditions for real impact and high visibility.

I shall begin work on the first front, modestly enough, by submitting to you at your forthcoming Spring session (the 159th) some proposed adjustments to the Programme and Budget for 2000-2001. On the proposal of the Executive Board, the General Conference asked me to find savings of some \$10 million in order to strengthen certain priority areas. This, I well understand, is a minimum figure. The idea is not to "make savings" for their own sake, to satisfy the fashionable call for austerity, but to re-examine our programmes, with a view to concentrating them; the forms of action that we take, with a view to selecting the most effective of them; and our staff structure, with a view to making it both more dynamic and more balanced. In all likelihood, the proposals for adjustments to document 30 C/5 will still not be quite as daring as I would have liked, since drastic reforms are not made in six months. They will point the way, and I hope that you will consider it to be the right way.

The preparation of the Medium-Term Strategy and the Draft Programme and Budget for 2002-2003, the first outlines of which will be submitted to you at your 160th session (October 2000), will provide an opportunity for examining much more radical hypotheses for the reshaping of our programmes. The basic criteria I shall follow in the difficult exercise of

programme concentration - the difficulty being due to the scope of UNESCO's mandate and the many different expectations placed in the Organization - are clear and unequivocal: they consist in concentrating action on those areas where UNESCO can make a unique contribution, either because it alone can play a decisive role there, or because it has a specific "added value" to bring to the work of other partners. These criteria are, of course, easier to spell out in general terms than to define precisely and, above all, to apply. I know that this is one of the items taken up by the Executive Board's Task Force on UNESCO in the twenty-first century. I can assure you that the Secretariat will provide every assistance to the Task Force, through the Director of my Executive Office, Ms Rivière. I can also assure you that the processes of consultation, both external and internal, which usually precede the preparation of the C/4 and C/5 documents will be carried out in close coordination with the members of the Task Force.

As for work on the second front of reform - relating to management - I intend to make a resolute start without wasting any time: it will be necessary to improve the effectiveness and transparency of the Organization, revitalize personal and collective responsibility and stimulate team spirit and a climate of confidence, without which no strategy or programme, however pertinent and concentrated it may be, has any chance of succeeding; it will also be necessary, as I have already stressed, to strengthen coordination and cooperation among the three statutory organs of the Organization - the Secretariat, the Executive Board and the General Conference - and to ensure both a clear division of labour and a real complementarity with other international institutions within or outside the United Nations system.

Many features are in need of evaluation and reform. The structure of the Secretariat and the profile and management of its staff will have to be adapted to the mandate and programme of the Organization by introducing both vitality and flexibility. This exercise will not be popular, either within the Secretariat or in the Member States and their Permanent Delegations, always in favour of reform so long as it does not affect their nationals too closely. Personally speaking, I am deeply attached to the independence of the international civil service, in keeping with the commitment I entered into in taking my oath before the General Conference. I expect everybody, both Secretariat and Member States, to respect that commitment as well.

We must accept the obvious: if we truly wish to revitalize our Organization, to renew its skills and reduce its professional staff, sacrifices will eventually have to be made; and without the solidarity of the Executive Board and Member States as a whole - political, moral and even financial solidarity - this shared ambition to optimize our Organization's resources will remain a dead letter.

If I use such words before you, it is not to excuse a possible failure in advance. No, this language of truth is a token of my confidence in the Board, from which I expect a great deal and to which I am equally ready to give a great deal. I expect enlightened advice, the fruit of long familiarity with UNESCO, and innovatory opinions capable of provoking and sustaining a real change in the culture of our Organization; I expect support and criticism - for there will certainly be criticism! - but above all unity of purpose in this ambition to reform that we hold in common. For my part, I shall always be attentive to you in your regular sessions as well as when we meet individually.

Madam Chairperson,

In regard to the management reforms that are indispensable, I shall concentrate on four priority lines of emphasis:

The first and probably the most important is the revitalization of the Secretariat: the staff of the Organization, as I have said, is its most precious asset. I would like to give it fresh impetus. The large number of retirements scheduled in the next few years provides a favourable opportunity. We need new blood at all levels of the hierarchy, a younger staff with a more modern organizational culture, and also an influx of the expert knowledge that is at present lacking in several new fields, such as the sociocultural implications of globalization or the ethics of science, in which UNESCO is called upon to play a leadership role.

Revitalizing the Secretariat also means reshaping the pyramid of grades. UNESCO is today one of the organizations of the United Nations system with the heaviest “superstructure”, with some 180 directors who have not all been given responsibility for policy, management and supervision that is normally the work of a director.

Lastly, revitalizing the Secretariat will mean introducing systems and mechanisms that will make it possible to constantly update workforce skills and adapt them to changes in the programme or in knowledge. This will mean, for example, creating more opportunities for continuing training or making greater use of short-term expertise (three or four years).

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

My second priority will seek to restore the spirit and the practice of responsibility within the Secretariat. Each level of the hierarchy should be given the means fully to exercise its responsibilities. This is particularly true as concerns the Assistant Directors-General of the programme sectors, who are the pillars of this Organization. I intend to endow these Programme Assistant Directors-General with full and total authority over their sector. I also expect them to form around me a collegial, cohesive management team inspired by a genuine spirit of intersectoral collaboration.

We therefore have to dispense with parallel hierarchies of whatever type of “special advisers”. In this spirit, I have begun to deal with “senior special advisers”, whom I requested immediately to cease all their duties within the Organization. Each Assistant Director-General should have at his or her fingertips the “governance” capability which UNESCO is seeking to promote within societies - that participatory governance which enables one and all, in consonance with their grade and responsibilities, to participate in decision-making and make their contribution to the implementation of those decisions. In this participatory governance, I naturally include dialogue with General Service staff, whose competence and dedication have been acknowledged by all.

The corollary to this policy of enhanced responsibility is called “accountability”, and is intimately linked to the transparency of information and to reporting requirements. The setting-up of the new integrated planning, budgeting and monitoring system will make it possible to institutionalize this notion of accountability and I fully intend to do everything to ensure the success of this system’s introduction as from the first year of my term of office.

Another reform of the same ilk will be the establishment of an oversight mechanism - an independent one which will be directly under my direct supervision, pooling the current

evaluation, inspectorate and audit services. I intend to request Member States which have the required expertise at their disposal to help me to devise and set up this mechanism.

The third part of my programme seeks to simplify and rationalize the Secretariat structure. Many speakers underlined this issue in their interventions during the General Conference. The present structure is far too fragmented, with a profusion of coordination units and ad hoc units, and involves many overlapping lines of authority. Naturally, the structural changes will have to be brought in at the same time as the new lines of thrust of the programme. Nevertheless, over the coming months, I shall be taking a number of measures designed to pool scattered units and clarify lines of authority. As of now, and following the voluntary departure of Mr Janicot, I have transferred the various units that came under the DRG structure back to the relevant programme sectors. I have done the same in regard to various units hitherto attached to the Director-General. This is a first step, albeit a small one, towards an organizational chart that is more balanced.

It has to be understood that rooting all programmes deeply in sectoral structures in no way diminishes the imperative of interdisciplinarity. While this should certainly stem from within the sectors, the best way to put interdisciplinarity into practice still has to be defined, and this will be one of the major challenges for the years to come.

The fourth line of emphasis of my programme aims to restore respect for rules and procedures. UNESCO is equipped with a set of procedures that can be most effective if applied. Doubtless, some need to be modernized or simplified. Yet it is important that it should not be left to the personal initiative of each staff member to interpret and adapt them!

The aim is to ensure complete transparency in staff recruitment and transfer procedures, in budget management - whatever the source of funds may be - and in the information supplied to the governing bodies. It is from this standpoint that, in agreement with the Organization's External Auditor, an audit of the internal functioning of the Participation Programme will be conducted as soon and as swiftly as possible, so as to increase the effectiveness of a tool to which a large number of Member States attach the greatest importance.

Madam Chairperson,

There is a third dimension to the reform, which supplements the issues of programme and management. I refer to decentralization. Decentralization has taken up a lot of time in the debates of the governing bodies over recent years. The General Conference has taken decisions in the matter, and I shall abide by them.

However, beyond the question of whether field units should be opened, or closed, it seems that we need to arrive at a clear understanding, and an understanding that is agreed to by all, on the tasks to be carried out by Headquarters and from Headquarters and those to be implemented in the field - whether by field units or other bodies such as National Commissions.

Once this has been clarified, it will undoubtedly be easier to determine the ideal design for our field presence, seen as a network of resources and expertise covering all the Organization's fields of competence.

For my part, I am a fervent believer in the decentralization of the Organization's activities. In order to be dynamic and visible, UNESCO needs to be present in Member States,

through its action and not necessarily through one or another predetermined type of structure. The key word in the case in point is without doubt flexibility: there can be no single model for all regions and all situations. The design should be adapted to the circumstances, to needs and to possibilities. The task before us is one of a rationalization of the structures of decentralization; this will have to be done pragmatically, and with a constant dialogue with all parties involved, Member States first.

Madam Chairperson,

In order to identify the means and phases of the reforms to be implemented, I have decided to set up **three task forces** within the Secretariat on the most urgent issues to be addressed:

1. adjustments to be made to document 30 C/5, and in the longer term, the redefinition of the Organization's strategy and programme priorities; this group will be placed under the responsibility of BPE;
2. staff matters and Headquarters Secretariat structure will be under the responsibility of Mr Henrikas Yushkiavitshus, ADG/CII, whom I have requested to remain with us a while longer to assist us in this task;
3. questions pertaining to decentralization, responsibility for which I have entrusted to Mr Stephen Hill, Director of the Jakarta Office.

The Task Force on the Secretariat's structure and staffing, namely the Task Force of Mr Yushkiavitshus, will, *inter alia*, assess the current structure and staffing of the Secretariat as compared with that foreseen in the Programme and Budget for 2000-2001 (30 C/5).

In this connection it is estimated that an amount of \$7.4 million, mainly due to reclassifications and promotions granted after the finalization of the draft 30 C/5 document, in March 1999, is not included in the staff costs ceiling approved by the General Conference.

In addition, recent decisions taken in October and in early November foresee the creation of 27 new posts (mainly Junior Professional posts) together with the appointment of specific incumbents to such posts for an estimated cost of \$4.4 million.

This means that an additional amount of \$11.8 million will have to be "absorbed" within the budget ceiling for staff costs as originally foreseen in document 30 C/5.

The situation seems rather serious, to such a point that I am wondering whether I should not suspend - temporarily - the application of the most recent decisions, for instance the decisions taken in October or in November, in order to assess their financial implications on the present biennium as well as on the next one.

The decision made by the General Conference in relation to the implementation of six to seven grades in the General Service category will of course have to be implemented. It entails additional costs that will have to be financed within the same budget ceiling.

Finally, it should be added that the number of budgeted vacant posts or posts to fall vacant during the next biennium is very limited. The margin for meeting the lapse factor as well as operating staff readjustments is therefore very small.

Madam Chairperson,

I intend to present my reform plan to the Executive Board in two stages:

the first will be at the 159th session, in May 2000, when I shall present:

- consolidated proposals for adjustments of document 30 C/5, combined with a plan to control staff costs and restore balance to the post structure;
- the principles concerning a new staff policy;
- and outline plans for a decentralization policy;

the second will be at the 160th session, in October 2000, when I shall be presenting concrete action plans on staff, Secretariat structure and decentralization, drawn up with due consideration to the comments and suggestions given by you in the Spring session. This latter session will also concentrate heavily on programme matters, since I shall have the honour to present to you my preliminary proposals for the next Medium-Term Strategy and document 31 C/5.

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have intentionally focused most of my intervention on the reform of our Organization in terms of management. Following the approval of the biennial programme and budget - to which certain adjustments will have to be made - this is really the most urgent task. The reform of the programme will acquire full significance when it comes to preparing the next strategy - a task which will begin in a few months' time. I shall therefore be coming back to my vision on this subject later.

This is our first meeting. There will be many others, which will enable us to get to know each other and, together, and in harmony, build the UNESCO of the next millennium. I shall spare no effort to that end.