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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by  
Mr Koichiro Matsuura

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

on the occasion of the international launch of the Scientific Council  
of the Israeli-Palestinian Science Organization (IPSO), in conjunction with  
the celebration of World Science Day for Peace and Development

UNESCO, 15 November 2004

Mr Chairperson of the IPSO Scientific Council,  
Distinguished Members of the IPSO Scientific Council,  
Nobel Laureates,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before speaking about the meeting for which you are assembled here today, I would like to say a few words about the passing of President Yasser Arafat and UNESCO's action concerning this sad event.

On learning of his death, I immediately expressed my sincere condolences to President Arafat's widow and her family, and to the Interim President of the Palestinian Authority, the Prime Minister and the Interim President of the PLO; through these messages, I wished to express not only my deep sympathy to them all but also to the Palestinian people.

I would like to wholeheartedly echo the remarks made by the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, following the passing away of President Arafat: "President Arafat was one of those few leaders who could be instantly recognized by people in any walk of life around the world. For nearly four decades, he expressed and symbolized in his person the national aspirations of the Palestinian people. President Arafat will always be remembered for having, in 1988, led the Palestinians to accept the principle of peaceful coexistence between Israel and a future Palestinian state. By signing the Oslo accords in 1993 he took a giant step towards the realization of this vision. It is tragic that he did not live to see it fulfilled."

I paid my first official visit to the Palestinian Territory, invited by President Arafat, in December 2000, in association with the Bethlehem 2000 event. On that occasion, I was warmly received by him and was his invited guest at a commemorative dinner marking Bethlehem 2000 that he organized. I attended a religious ceremony with him and opened the Museum of the Nativity. We held a bilateral meeting, when we had a chance to talk about several important matters.

I did not meet President Arafat again after that but subsequently we were in contact by letter and, on a couple of occasions, by telephone, most recently last June at the time when the Deputy Director-General, Marcio Barbosa, was leading an inter-sectoral UNESCO mission in Ramallah. During our telephone conversation, I mentioned how pleased I had been to visit Bethlehem with him four and a half years ago. He said that I was welcome to visit Bethlehem again at any moment and that we would go together once more. President Arafat appreciated UNESCO's commitment to and activities for the Palestinian people and our abiding concern for peace in the Middle East.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn from this sad topic to your meeting here in Paris. It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to the international launch of the Scientific Council of the Israeli-Palestinian Science Organization (IPSO). It is an auspicious occasion. I am particularly glad that this event will mark this year's celebration of the World Science Day for Peace and Development. I clearly remember the presence of some of you at the UNESCO Round Table on "Science for Peace" in November 2002, where the idea of IPSO was born. Turning a good idea into a practical reality is what this meeting is all about.

For UNESCO, IPSO is a vivid illustration of our mission to contribute to peace through concrete actions. Our belief is that scientific cooperation and advancement have to be used for peaceful purposes and for the greater benefit of all societies. Given the deep structural relationship between science and peace, there are good reasons to expect scientists to contribute in their capacity as scientists to the peace process.

We all agree that, more than ever before, we need peace in the Middle East region, along the lines of the Road Map for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. This is why I wish here to commend your initiative to establish the Israeli-Palestinian Science Organization which aims at enhancing cooperation between scientists in this region through joint scientific projects. These activities will benefit not only scientific research and the advancement of knowledge but also the people in the region.

Through this international launch of your Organization today here at UNESCO, you remind us that peace and development have a substantive content and that science can indeed contribute to peace, which is a precondition for attaining sustainable development and social justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Scientists have played an important role in contributing to peace efforts between states. Science is by nature transboundary in its scope and in the very activities through which it is conducted. And scientists, of course, maintain a lively transnational dialogue among themselves. Science advances through the exchange of knowledge; the scientific spirit flourishes where open dialogue prevails. UNESCO has long recognised that the processes of mutual co-operation within science in general can also be useful for establishing contact and maintaining collaboration among scientists in regions riven by conflict. The possibilities for peace, indeed the very instinct for peace, can be kept alive in this way.

It is our shared responsibility to strengthen the scientific enterprise for the benefit of all countries of the world. Through your scientific co-operation, you are building peaceful bridges among people in conflict. This is in line with UNESCO's mission to contribute to peace through education, science and culture. We in UNESCO believe that, through this scientific cooperation, dialogue and communication, you are helping to lay the foundation for peace in the Middle East.

Let me recall that, in keeping with its mandate, UNESCO's action in favour of reconstruction and reconciliation in that region has been, and continues to be, the promotion of dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians by re-establishing and strengthening links among intellectuals, representatives of the academic community and civil society from both sides. In so doing, we hope to support increased professional exchanges and partnerships, which can bring shared visions and solutions to bear upon common scientific issues vital for development and peace in the region.

Today, through this international launch of IPSO, we are creating a new and unique opportunity for research partnerships between Palestinians and Israelis. The underlying principles of parity among researchers and the highest research standards, as stated by IPSO, are fundamental guarantees of a professional and impartial dialogue, which UNESCO values and is proud to support.

Let me take this opportunity to call upon the international community to support this initiative. UNESCO stands ready to fund-raise on behalf of IPSO and to serve as the channel for this support. In this way, and through the assistance and advice of the Organization's Science Sector, UNESCO can be counted on to promote and facilitate the further development of IPSO in the period ahead.

Let me conclude in recalling that peace is the ultimate aim of all that UNESCO undertakes and that the most efficient means of promoting reconciliation amongst people is to give them the opportunity to know each other, to talk and think together, to understand one another's fears and beliefs; in other words, to create an opportunity for cooperation. As eminent scientists in your respective fields, you are powerful allies in that mission.

In that spirit, I wish every success to your organization.

Thank you.