

DG/97/34  
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address  
by  
Mr Federico Mayor

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

at the Second E-9 Ministerial Review Meeting

Islamabad (Pakistan), 16 September 1997

Honourable Ministers of Finance and Education of Pakistan,  
Honourable Ministers and Vice-Ministers of  
the E-9 countries,  
Dr Nafis Sadik, Executive Director of UNFPA,  
Distinguished participants,  
Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are here to reaffirm our commitment, that of the E-9 countries and of the United Nations system, to education and to the liberation of each human being. We are here to express our resolve to give each woman and man the capacity to master their destiny, to shape their own future. We are here to say that the E-9 countries, that the United Nations system, consider education as the key to the future. In all the major recent UN conferences - on environment, population, human rights, women, social development - Member States have agreed that education can open the way towards a brighter and more just future for all the people on this earth. We are here to help the E-9 countries, and particularly the Pakistani Government, parliament and people, to invest more and more in education. We are here to tell you all, and particularly the Government of Pakistan, that we come here without models, without conditions. We come here, in the spirit of Jomtien and of the New Delhi agreement, to listen and to learn. Our sole aim is to help the governments concerned put into practice what they consider, what they are better placed than us to know, must be done in order to improve educational provision for their people at all levels and throughout life.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the recent UN meeting held in New York to review progress five years after the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, there was only one good piece of news - the decline in the rates of global population growth. Why is this happening? Because more and more people, adults and children, today have access to education. In the last six years there has been a substantial reduction in the illiteracy rate among the 15 to 60 age group. This means that we have been able to reduce illiteracy by more than 50 million, equivalent to one third of the out-of-school children in the world.

This was the good news. The bad news was that nothing more important and relevant has been done concerning the environment. We live in a reporting society. We have a very good diagnosis of what must be done. We have expressed all our needs in fine words. But now is the time for action, for moving from words to deeds. The reporting society is also a postponing society. We are postponing the moment when all the prescribed treatments must be applied, and we do so at our peril. For as a scientist, and particularly a scientist specialized in brain metabolism, I like to repeat that we must take into account the possibility of

irreversibility, of reaching a point of no return in many social and environmental processes.

This is why it is important to identify the roots of the problems that afflict us. We must know that it is in poverty and exclusion that emigration flows, extremism, violence and conflict originate. We must also recognize what we are here to affirm - that the solution to these problems lies essentially in education, in providing people everywhere with the opportunity of developing their distinctive capacities to create, to innovate, to invent, to think by themselves, to assent or dissent according to their own lights. We live in a world where people are increasingly becoming spectators, being no more than the reflection of external influences. Yet we know that it is only by creating in people the possibility to forge new attitudes and behaviour that we will overcome the present challenges.

This is why I consider, as I said yesterday, that it is so timely to focus this ministerial segment of the E-9 on the issue of mobilization. We must see how we can genuinely mobilize, how we can have a multiplier effect, so as to achieve our goal of reaching the unreached and including the excluded. This is what really matters. We must mobilize the human conscience, mobilize governments and mobilize the parliaments. The parliaments must be with us. In a democratic country, responsibility does not only lie with the government or the administration. We want the parliaments to support increases in educational investments. Similarly we need the support of the media to create the necessary public commitment. This is democracy - when government heeds the voice of the citizens.

The question is then: how can we mobilize support at the popular level? We have seen how the media can in the space of 24 hours achieve an immense mobilization of the world in relation to a much-loved personality. I think they must now help us in mobilizing political will, popular will, in favour of education, in favour of including the excluded, in favour of reaching the as yet unreached. Yes, we must forge a new partnership - a new partnership involving the media, the parliaments, the municipalities because it is at the local level that education can be promoted and enhanced.

Education is a human right, a fundamental human right, which is why we cannot think in terms of seed money alone. Real investments in the countries concerned are what is required. The importance of education must also be reflected in national budgets. Loans are all very well but loans must be repaid. Priority must be given to education in the budget of the countries concerned.

We also need innovative approaches - as stressed at the World Conference on Adult Education in Hamburg. We need

approaches, for example, that reflect the conditions in which women and girls in rural areas are living. How can we decide on the best approaches from our offices in Paris, New York, London or wherever ? We must go to these women and say: "Tell us how can we help you" ? Then you will see that our approaches will be very different. Hopefully now, after Hamburg, they really will be different and together with our allies the non-governmental organizations we shall be able to produce this vitally necessary mobilization.

If we can achieve effective mobilization in favour of education, then we can have the teacher training and updating we need, particularly in-service training, we can have the learning materials that we require and the curriculum development that is so essential. If I was asked what, as a teacher, I thought the most important factor was I would say curriculum development, I would say the values, the universal values, that condition attitudes and shape behaviour. Sometimes we put too many things in the curriculum and we forget to include what really matters - the values that determine attitudes in our children and which must be transmitted as the most important heritage to our children. UNESCO is sometimes seen as existing to safeguard stone monuments. Of course, this is one of our functions. However, what really matters for UNESCO is not the physical heritage, it is the non-physical heritage, it is the ethical heritage that is the essence of all civilizations throughout the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Education for all, through all and throughout life is our aim. I think that the concept of "throughout life" has been the most important addition we have made to educational thinking. Education must be throughout life because this is the only way to reach the unreached and to include the excluded. It is the only way to ensure the capacity building and personal sovereignty that is so important to our common future. We have the key. Invest in education if you care about population, about the environment, about health, about nutrition. We must realize - and I am happy that the Minister of Finance is honouring us today with his presence at this meeting - that we cannot pay at the same time the price of war and the price of peace. The price of peace means paying for human welfare - for water, for energy, for health and for education. If we invest in education, we will reduce conflicts, we will make democracy less vulnerable, we will provide security for all the citizens. To achieve all this - on the eve of a new century and millennium - we must better share knowledge and resources. We must **dare** to share. This is perhaps the best message that we who are meeting at this E-9 ministerial segment can give to the world - that we must care and that we must dare to share. I thank you for your attention.