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Address by
Mr Koichiro Matsuura

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

on the occasion of the Launch
of the Integrated Sustainable Community Initiative
at the Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal

Durban, South Africa, 11 July 2005

Vice Chancellor,
Ambassador,
UN Resident Coordinator,
Professors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with you today for this launch of the Integrated Sustainable Community Initiative. Let me begin by thanking the university authorities for the warm welcome I have received here at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Not all of you were there, so let me tell you what a joy it was to experience the energy and artistic expression of the young people at the opening ceremony of the World Heritage Committee last night.

The Millenium Development Goals, which countries have committed themselves to achieve by 2015, have at their core the reduction of poverty. In his address to the first joint sitting of the third democratic Parliament, President Mbeki reiterated this by making the commitment to move South Africa towards the eradication of poverty and under-development, improve the quality of life for all South Africans and address the persistent challenges of racial and gender inequality.

Illiteracy is both a cause and result of poverty and, indeed, is seen as an indicator of poverty. The HIV/AIDS epidemic has also been characterized as a disease of the poor. Equally important is addressing the issue of social cohesion caused by decades of deliberately enforced social divisions. Thus, improving literacy, strengthening the coping mechanisms for dealing with HIV/AIDS and strengthening respect for human rights can contribute greatly to addressing the goals that South Africa has set for itself.

It is these issues that led the Government to agree that the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) in South Africa will focus on the three provinces that had been most disadvantaged in the past: Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. The Integrated Sustainable Community Initiative is integrated in that it is addressing, in one strategy, three problems that greatly affect the quality of life and social cohesion: HIV/AIDS, literacy and human rights. Two of these, literacy and mitigating the impact of HIV/AIDS on education, are at the heart of UNESCO's priorities for sub-Saharan Africa. Addressing human rights cuts across all UN action.

My Organization is committed to seeing the reduction of illiteracy on the continent by the end of the Literacy Decade in 2012. Moreover, with the support of other United Nations agencies and other development partners, UNESCO is embarking on EDUCAIDS, a Global Initiative on Education and HIV/AIDS aimed at preventive education and mitigating the impact of the epidemic through work on

educational planning and management; curriculum development; and teacher education; and welfare, across both formal and non-formal education. In so doing, we hope to continue the forward march towards Education for All by the year 2015.

The Initiative is also integrated in the sense that it draws upon the resources of communities, universities, and the public and private sectors. It will seek donor support in addressing issues that affect the people of the provinces. UNESCO, with my personal support, will assist in seeking such donor support.

UNESCO is very proud of the intellectual partnership that it has fostered through University Chairs. The three chairs involved in this Initiative are special in their own individual ways. Of historical importance for its struggle for human rights, Fort Hare is the seat of the award-winning Oliver Tambo Human Rights Chair. The record of South Africa in the struggle for human rights is beyond compare and tomorrow there will be the ceremony of conferral of the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadorship for Human Rights on South Africa's outstanding son and, I believe, graduate of Fort Hare, Mr Nelson Mandela.

It was at the University of KwaZulu-Natal that the national launch of the United Nations Literacy Decade took place in grand style last year and where the idea of ISCI was born. At the University of Limpopo, the Chair is in biotechnology, but the chairholder is willing to use his social capital to contribute to a different skill area, ISCI, while continuing to revitalize the core biotechnology work required of him.

Another interesting facet of this work from a UNESCO perspective is that it will draw on research and best practice to inform the strategies to be used. This is at the heart of the work of UNESCO - as a catalyst for ideas; standard-setter; motivator of networks; and disseminator of best practice.

Since the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000, the international community has striven to meet the Education for All (EFA) goals and targets enshrined in the Dakar Framework for Action. Despite many efforts, progress has been slow and projections show that achieving EFA remains a tremendous challenge. The Dakar +5 Conference held recently in Dakar, which reviewed the EFA situation in Africa, urged all Member States to accelerate their efforts towards achieving the EFA goals. The recommendations for improving EFA intervention strategies include the following:

- Ensure that necessary measures are taken to provide access to free education to vulnerable groups such as orphans, victims of conflict or natural disasters, as well as children with special needs. ISCI is addressing this recommendation through education for the most disadvantaged communities.

- Analyse and select best practices regarding the improvement of educational quality outputs. This Initiative will seek out, improve and disseminate best practice.
- Ensure an increase in the funds allocated to non-formal education, both through regular budgets and through the contribution of financial partners. The project proposes using resources from various funding sources and UNESCO will assist in mobilizing funds for this largely non-formal education project.
- Ensure that the effects of HIV/AIDS on educational systems (teachers, vulnerable groups) are incorporated into planning and resource allocation processes. Addressing HIV/AIDS education is at the core of this project.

Thus, in the three provinces, this project will operationalize the major recommendations of Dakar +5.

I am also pleased that the launch of the Literacy Decade kick-started the partnership resulting in a cross-provincial collaboration among KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces. The Integrated Sustainable Community Initiative (ISCI) shows the collaboration between the South African National Commission for UNESCO; the UNESCO Chairs and project leaders from the three Universities of KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Limpopo Provinces; the UNESCO Windhoek Cluster Office; communities; non-governmental organizations; and also the private sector. It is truly a joint venture and marks the kind of partnership for development foreseen by NEPAD and the Millennium Development Goals. ISCI promises much, but it also demands much work to be the model we expect that it will become.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It now gives me great pleasure to renew UNESCO's commitment to the project and to declare the joint university Integrated Sustainable Community Initiative for literacy, HIV/AIDS and human rights in the provinces of Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo officially launched.

Thank you.