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Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, at the Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi, 16 September 2000

I am most humbly grateful to you for honouring me with the distinction of Doctor Honoris Causa. My thanks go first to you, Mr Rector, Academician Roin Metreveli, for organizing this important meeting in the presence of Georgian personalities of culture and science. It is an especial pleasure for me to address an audience of eminent intellectuals, here at such a leading educational institution of your country. This University is in the forefront of efforts to build peace, by teaching young generations the ethical values which make democracy and human development possible.

Peace-building and reconstruction, then, is at the centre of your concerns. It is barely necessary for me to recall the ideals that underlie the work of UNESCO. You know them well: building the defences of peace in the mind of men. We stand together, therefore, in a common effort.

Peace is, indeed, the precondition for any human progress: the challenges of sustainable development and of healthy environmental management, and their corollary, the elimination of poverty and all forms of exclusion, can only be taken up in the context of a culture, of a spirit, of peace; **in a context of peace-building.**

The age of "globalization" - one of urgency, of impatience, of immediacy - does not always allow for a clear understanding of the fundamental role an organization like UNESCO plays on the international scene to this end. UNESCO's action is carried out with a medium to long-term perspective; it takes time. Working in its specialized areas of education, science, culture and communication, UNESCO's action nevertheless seeks to have a far-reaching effect on societies, giving them the practical means to lay the foundations for a peaceful existence.

UNESCO is at times criticized for failing to be "on the ground" in times of conflict, tension or crisis. This is to mistake UNESCO's core mission, which is upstream and downstream of such crises, seeking to avert them through preventive action where possible, seeking to assist in reconstruction where the worst has happened.

War and conflict are rooted in destitution, social injustice, political oppression, human rights violations. But there is another cause - one of the most tenacious. It is ignorance. The chain reactions which ignorance sparks off are highly destructive - insidiously fanning xenophobia, fear, even hatred of others, of their differences. Individuals, groups, and cultures stand in opposition one to another. Barriers go up, whether physical or psychological. Dialogue dies. And with it any chance of a proper awareness of the Other. UNESCO thus places education at the heart of peace-building. Education to learn to read, to write, to count, to learn. But more than anything else education to learn to know others, to respect them, and to live together with them in harmony.

Culture, science and communication, too, are part of this endeavour towards greater mutual understanding. Together they all lay sound foundations for peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fine words, these. But I know that particularly in a region such as yours, words themselves are grossly insufficient. Without action, one gets nowhere.

This is also my conviction, which is why I have been seeking, since I took over at the helm of UNESCO, to enhance UNESCO's practical efforts to translate the message and culture of peace into action. **Peace-building in action.**

Let me therefore dwell on some instances where UNESCO's global mission and strategies are given concrete effect more locally and carefully

tailored to the inevitably highly complex specificities of each individual situation.

UNESCO has been actively involved in the reconstruction of Cambodia, after its people had been subjected to long years of hardship under an infamous regime and harrowing situations of misery, cruelty and death. We began with an intersectoral needs assessment, and have been following up over the years with projects in education, culture and communication. Perhaps the most visible - and sensitive - activity has concerned the preservation of the temples of Angkor, where UNESCO successfully sensitized international public opinion to the dangers of destruction faced by this - as by other - heritage monuments under armed conflict.

Mozambique's advance towards independence was a slow and arduous one, and UNESCO's involvement, especially in the area of education, was one of pre-independence preparation for nationhood, notably through training and fellowships for Mozambican cadres, provided either abroad or in the bush. The troubled early years of independence, after 1975, saw UNESCO assisting in the massive difficulties faced by the nearly one million people who fled abroad.

UNESCO has since the early nineties stepped up its support for the country's development, assisting the government in preparing the education development plan, and drawing attention to the need for environmental preservation and management of marine resources.

I was in Mozambique last July, for the third Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Community of Portuguese-speaking countries and had an opportunity to meet the President, Mr Joaquim Chissano. This was an opportunity for me to reaffirm the Organization's determination to continue to assist his country.

Mozambique's recent history has been chequered, to say the least. Yet the country is now looked upon as a reference in peace-building and the construction of a democracy. The efforts of the Mozambican people demonstrate what can be done - once they are united - for the development of sustainable peace. **Peace-building by learning to reconcile.**

In such efforts of nation-building, UNESCO has also been actively present in past years as the people of Palestine has struggled for greater recognition and sovereignty. After the 1948 War, one of the direst consequences of which was the drama of the refugees, UNESCO was never more active than in coping with the problems of their education and well-being, in close cooperation with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), participating notably in the construction and smooth running of schools for the Palestinian refugees. It has also worked tirelessly to encourage lasting peace so that democracy, human rights, tolerance and mutual understanding might flourish.

Last December, one of the first trips I made as Director-General was to Bethlehem, where, with Chairman Arafat, I agreed on steps to be taken to strengthen UNESCO's Programme of Activities for the Palestinian People (PAPP), which contains a broad swathe of activities within UNESCO's fields of specialization so as to assist as the Palestinian people progress - at times laboriously - toward nationhood. We have been following up on this agreement carefully since then. **Peace-building through nation-building.**

Recently, the people of East Timor voted by means of direct, secret and universal ballot to begin a process leading towards independence. UNESCO has joined with the United Nations Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), which was established to administer the territory and exercise legislative and executive authority during the transition period. UNESCO is helping rebuild a newspaper industry in East Timor. An independent press is an essential factor for the development of democracy. A series of projects to help restore East-Timor's print and audiovisual media infrastructure - devastated during violence last year

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- are under way. Implemented jointly with the World Association of Newspapers, it is an example of partnership with professional media organizations which the United Nations, and in particular UNESCO, should continue to promote in war-torn countries.

In a somewhat different context, UNESCO is also supporting the efforts of the new administration in Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, to build a new democratic society, after a period during which the military dictatorship had cut the country off from democracy and the international community. Since the return of democracy, and thanks largely to the efforts of President Obasanjo, the Federal Republic of Nigeria has joined other countries in renewing its commitment to education at the World Forum on Education for

All that was held in Dakar in April 2000. I have personally discussed many issues with the President, with whom I signed a Memorandum of Co-operation last February, in Paris, and whom I have seen a further three times since. Nigeria has now embarked on a major programme to plan and prepare strategies for achieving basic education for all its people. In this context, the Nigerian authorities see UNESCO as one of its main partners to assist in building the capacity of its various institutions and units to better plan and manage education. In the light of past experience of such programmes, issues of sustainability and cost effectiveness are being given special attention.

The challenge has been to meet the needs of such a vast and culturally diverse population and simultaneously promote national unity, peace and development. The Government sees education as one of the key contributors to achieving national objectives. **Peace-building by learning to learn.** In Algeria too, the years of civil unrest and sectarian violence following the cancellation of the elections of 1992 have left the population in dire need of reconciliation. President Bouteflika has pledged his every effort to achieving the "civil concord" without which the much needed development and progress of the country cannot occur. I have discussed with President Bouteflika how to start new co-operation in the areas of UNESCO's competence.

It is in particular in the education sector that the main thrust of our reactivated collaboration is to take place with the provision of independent expertise to the work of the Education Commission that has been set up, and the much greater emphasis on new technologies in the organization of the education system to achieve true democratization. We shall also explore other areas of cooperation like culture, development of democracy. A series of projects to help restore East-Timor's print and audiovisual media infrastructure - devastated during violence last year - are under way. Implemented jointly with the World Association of

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Science can contribute to peace and stability in two ways. First, there is an important scientific dimension to many of the problems facing the region. Cross-border research into freshwater resources or energy, for example, can offer integrated solutions, thus defusing tensions which arise over resource shortages.

Second, by encouraging close working relationships between individuals and institutions, scientific cooperation offers concrete experience of the benefits of tolerance, solidarity and understanding. Through their scientific rapprochement such institutions and individuals will be at the forefront of the political rapprochement that this region so badly needs. I discussed these matters personally with His Majesty the King of Jordan during my attendance at the June meeting of the Interim Council of SESAME, which decided to locate the Synchrotron in Jordan.

#### **Peace-building through scientific cooperation.**

In Asia, following the Inter-Korean Dialogue after the Summit Meeting of June 2000 in Pyongyang, UNESCO can serve as one of the important channels of cooperation in the Korean Peninsula. I have just visited both countries and in light of the recent favourable developments not only on the Korean peninsula but also more broadly in the North-East Asian sub-region, discussed possible roles for UNESCO in Inter-Korean collaboration. There is much UNESCO can do. The Secretaries-General of the National Commissions for UNESCO in the five countries of East Asia: the Koreas, China, Japan and Mongolia have now begun to meet regularly. The third such meeting is about to be held in Macau, China. During this meeting, there is to be an exhibition of children's paintings from the five countries on the theme of the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Other recent projects include arrangements for inter-Korean science fellowships through UNESCO-sponsored regional networks managed from our Jakarta office. During my discussions with senior officials of both countries, we have discussed a possible new initiative which, if accepted by both countries, would have the cross-border region in the Korean Peninsula - an area of remarkably rich biodiversity - registered as a Biosphere Reserve.

#### **Peace-building through the patient, step-by-step restoration of confidence.**

Before coming to Georgia, upon the invitation of President Islam Karimov, I visited Uzbekistan. Since the emergence of the new independent



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states of Central Asia after nearly 70 years of isolation, this key region is gradually gaining its place in the international context and becoming the geographic bridge between Asia and Europe. But, Central Asia is above all a cultural and spiritual cross-roads of civilizations. Despite the major role played by Central Asia in shaping the history of the past and of today, this vast region had not yet been studied as a cultural entity. UNESCO is helping this process by publishing the History of the Civilizations of Central Asia, supporting the International Institute for Central Asian Studies in Samarkand, and by implementing cultural tourism projects along the Silk Roads. An important objective of these endeavours is to highlight several aspects of tangible and intangible heritage which are common to the various cultures of Central Asia, and the processes underlying reciprocal exchange between Occident and Orient. This was the spirit of the International Congress for Inter-Religious Dialogue, which I opened on 14 September in Tashkent. By encouraging forums of dialogue between communities which belong to different religious and cultural spheres, we can contribute to the renewal of perceptions of "otherness" and can strengthen solidarity.

This is an example of peace-building by promoting the concept of common heritage and plural identity.

The success of democratic values and the promotion of civil culture in a region with as historically troubled and complex a context as South-Eastern Europe, here again, depends on mutual understanding and good neighbourliness. Education, in particular through teaching of history, human rights and civic education, must play an important role in this regard. Two recent meetings focussed on the interweaving cultures in South-Eastern Europe and on combating stereotypes in history textbooks in the region. Such efforts are only part of a vast undertaking that requires the active participation of governmental authorities, civil society and in particular young people. In close collaboration with the Member States concerned and in partnership with other organizations, UNESCO is increasing its cooperation, building upon the region's unique and diverse cultural identities and its historically close cultural links.

In the same vein, I should also like to mention the recent Conference on Stability and Security in the Adriatic and Ionian Region, hosted by Italy in Ancona last May 2000, in which I participated. The Italian authorities, which sponsored this meeting, in close cooperation with the European Commission, had indeed clearly perceived the value of such understanding as they seek, in cooperation with neighbouring states, to deal with some of the current difficulties arising out of the prevailing tensions in the region. UNESCO could not but support this Conference, as it does the Declaration issued at the close of its proceedings.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Here are examples, then, of UNESCO's increasingly recognized role in the promotion of a better understanding of the root causes of conflicts. The ethnic or religious aspects of conflicts warrant UNESCO's involvement in order to address some of the most complex aspects of conflict - the human, historical and psychological factors - and to seek to address them through dialogue. In all these examples, there is an underlying message, relating to the importance of promoting dialogue among civilizations and cultures.

Georgia - our hosts for this meeting - has played a pioneering role in this regard. One remembers when your country hosted the international conference "For peace and tolerance, for a dialogue among cultures" in 1995. This was followed by two other international forums in Moldova and the Russian Federation. These events showed that the dialogue among civilizations

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constitutes an essential stage in the process of building peace in the Caucasus and in other sub-regions of Central and Eastern Europe, by nurturing an awareness of the common links rooted in history, heritage and tradition. Dialogue among civilizations was the subject of the most recent round table which I chaired in New York, on the eve of the United Nations Millennium Summit. It brought together, inter alia, ten Heads of State, among them President Shevardnadze, who pointed out in his statement that such dialogue is an essential means "to prevent the devastating manifestations of xenophobia, ethnic cleansing and intolerance and to develop not merely the dialogue of cultures, but elaborate a system for the interaction of cultures".

I fully agree with this analysis and am convinced - as I trust I have demonstrated - of the significance of building a climate conducive to the development of relations based on the principles of tolerance, respect for cultural, religious and ethnic pluralism, non-violence and dialogue as a way of alleviating tensions and settling conflicts. A more in-depth regional analysis based on the prevailing historical and geographical context should inform and guide the actions of UNESCO and other international and national actors and decision-makers in order to build peace.

This is the rationale of the **Caucasus Plan** proposed by the three countries of the region, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, a project which has my unswerving attention. Georgia is the second country of the region that I am visiting during this year. My first visit was to Azerbaijan, where I attended the celebration of the 1300th anniversary of Dede Gorgud, the Azeri epic. This brings to mind the Georgian literary masterpiece, a widely-known epic poem written by Shota Rustaveli. The Caucasus thus has diverse historical roots, national traditions and religion, but at the same time it is a compact subregion comprising countries with long-lasting historical, cultural and scientific ties. It is a subregion which historically has been at the crossroads of many civilizations, cultures and trade routes; in particular the famous "Silk Road". It is, I believe, a good choice for a priority pilot project. It could prove to be of great value not only in working out new concepts and new forms of cooperation responding to new realities, and could also be expanded to other regions.

During my present official visit to the Republic of Georgia, President Shevardnadze and I have agreed on new openings for the Caucasus Plan and on expanded cooperation between UNESCO and the Republic of Georgia. It is with special satisfaction that we have taken note, during our talks, of other concrete subregional activities, such as a Network of the Pedagogical Institutes of the Caucasus region, to function under the aegis of UNESCO and including in its initial stage pedagogical and language institutions from Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. This activity was launched by the Orbeliani State Pedagogical University in Tbilisi, in cooperation with UNESCO. For the first time for ten years, representatives of these institutions in the three countries met together to discuss the problems of cooperation. The network, launched in June 2000, is intersectoral and fully corresponds to the needs of countries in conflict, in which special attention has to be given to building up their education systems. The Network will operate on the basis of the UNESCO Chairs and Associated Schools concepts. UNESCO supports the network as the only existing structure for educational cooperation in the subregion. It can therefore be mobilized to give follow-up to the Dakar Forum, concentrating on such issues as education of marginalised youth, refugees and displaced populations, environmental education, education and reduction of poverty, and intercultural and civic education.

A subregional workshop on "The Reform of Science in the Countries of the South Caucasus in the Context of the Market Economy" is scheduled for May 2001 in Tbilisi. Representatives of governmental institutions and the Academies of Sciences of Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Russia

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are expected to attend the meeting.

I believe that these activities among academic and cultural circles will pave the way for enhanced collaboration at the highest political level.

One more practical step forward in our excellent cooperation is before us today. I am referring to the fact that Rector Metreveli and I have just signed a new agreement for the establishment of a UNESCO/INCORVUZ Chair for the development of non-governmental organizations in countries in transition. Such initiatives, though they may seem low key, are in fact what UNESCO is all about, and what I have been seeking to demonstrate in my remarks to you today.

National projects of this type, in collaboration with NGOs, are most welcome as your countries strive to learn what "civil society" actually means, how it works best, how it can be structured according to local realities on the basis of universally accepted democratic principles; then to initiate training programmes, that others may share this knowledge.

Mr Rector,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, allow me to encourage you all, therefore, as individuals who are contributing as much in your own ways, if not more, than UNESCO, to our common goal of peace and development. I have welcomed this opportunity to outline some of the dimensions of the objectives which organizations such as UNESCO seek to achieve, in partnership with its Member States, with civil society, with the intellectual and academic communities.

It now remains for me most gratefully to accept the distinction conferred upon me, which you will allow me to take as a tribute more to UNESCO and the ideals it represents than to myself.

Thank you.

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partnership