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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
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Draft

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of the Opening Ceremony of the
UNESCO World Conference on Education for
Sustainable Development
“Moving into the Second Half of the UN Decade”**

Bonn, Germany, 31 March 2009

Honourable Federal Minister of Education and Research
of Germany,

Honourable President of the Standing Conference of the
Ministers of Education and Culture of the German
Länder,

Ms Graca Machel,

Ministers,

Heads of Delegation,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honour for me to open this mid-term review conference for the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

I warmly thank the Government of Germany for its generosity in hosting this World Conference and providing such a splendid venue in Bonn. My particular thanks to Minister Schavan for all of her efforts to ensure the success of this important event.

We are deeply honoured by the presence of Ms Graca Machel, an outstanding woman of Africa who has stood up for the rights and needs of children everywhere. We are very much looking forward to your keynote presentation and to the distinctive perspective you bring to the themes of this conference.

I also look forward to the remarks of Queen Rania of Jordan who, for reasons beyond her control, is unable to join us in person this morning. I know she is greatly disappointed not to be here in Bonn, but through the video that will be shown, I am sure that her thoughts on the global picture of education will be inspiring to us all.

Let me take this opportunity to welcome all of you: namely, the over 900 participants who have come to this conference from all regions, all sectors and all constituencies of the Decade. Among you are over fifty ministers or deputy ministers of education and representatives of more than 100 countries. This is a

clear sign that the theme of this conference – education for sustainable development (ESD) – is rising higher on national agendas. I am confident that, with your participation and engagement, this World Conference will be a real milestone not only within the Decade but also for the success of ESD in the longer term.

This World Conference is, of course, highly important in its own right. But it is also part of a series of major international education events that UNESCO is holding in 2008-2009 focused – beyond ESD – on inclusive education, basic education for all, adult learning, and higher education.

This conference cycle aims to encourage a dynamic and far-reaching reflection on the transformative power of education. It also seeks to engage policy-makers, researchers, practitioners and a range of institutions in re-orienting education systems – from pre-school to adult learning, in formal and non-formal settings – in ways that promote equity, innovation and sustainable development.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In a world trying to come to grips with a major financial and economic crisis, with environmental degradation and climate change, with social tensions and conflict, there is

growing global consensus that the international community must unite to prepare for a better common future. This consensus was anticipated by the decision of the UN General Assembly to create a Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD), running from 2005 to 2014, in recognition of the critical role that education plays in development.

But it is not just any kind of education. It is about learning *for* change and about learning *to* change. In particular, it is about the content and processes of education that will help us to learn to live together sustainably.

If education systems are characterized by inequality, discrimination and exclusion, they risk perpetuating or even deepening the social and economic disparities that exist.

That is why ESD aims to encourage a shift towards more inclusive education systems, grounded in a respect for diversity and a recognition of interdependence – both with each other and the environment in which we live.

ESD is based on the belief that everyone has the right to learn, the capacity to contribute and the commitment to ensure that others share in the benefits of development. This belief is also at the heart of the Education for All

goals and indeed the entire Millennium Development agenda.

The strategies UNESCO is putting in place, as global coordinator of the EFA movement and of the DESD, are aimed at linking quality education for all with the ultimate goal of sustainable development in each and every country.

Yet, this goal is under tremendous pressure. There is a widespread sense that time is running out, that key decisions are being deferred and delayed, and that public opinion remains poorly informed about what is at stake.

All of us – individuals, organizations, governments – have difficult choices to make. ESD is a way to make those choices better informed, more attuned to the urgency of the problems we face, and more aligned with the core human values that bind us together.

And let us never forget that our choices today are not just for ourselves but also for the future – in other words, for our children, our grandchildren and their descendants.

In a sense, of course, we no longer have a choice. The principles, values and practices of sustainable development *must* find their place in children's schooling,

higher education, community-based learning activities and workplace training programmes. If the aim of ESD is to provide us with the knowledge, skills and competences to address the problems that we face in the 21st century, then ESD is not an option but an imperative.

To be relevant and up-to-date, ESD must engage seriously with today's issues and challenges.

Take the case of climate change, which as you know will be the subject of a major UN conference in Copenhagen in December 2009.

While climate change is not the only environmental threat to the sustainability of the planet, it is a priority for policy-makers and the general public alike because it will affect all of us.

Education for and about climate change is a significant aspect of ESD; and the ESD perspective – with its emphasis on the economic, the social and the cultural as well as the environmental dimensions – can be especially helpful in shaping our response.

With support from the Government of Denmark, UNESCO will be organizing an international seminar on climate change education in Paris in late July. This

meeting will learn from the discussions here in Bonn and will provide a valuable educational perspective for the Copenhagen conference in December.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here to Bonn to reflect on how we can move forward the ESD agenda. In this regard, it is vital that we build on the lessons of experience.

The DESD Global Monitoring and Evaluation Framework was put in place to assess the implementation of the Decade. This week we are making available the latest draft of the global report on DESD implementation, which focuses on the structures and mechanisms put into place to advance all of our work on ESD at global, regional and national levels.

In addition, in the lead-up to Bonn, a number of meetings took place – in Bordeaux, Gothenburg, Nairobi and Tokyo – whose outcomes will likewise feed into our discussions.

Let me highlight three of the lessons or findings that I find particularly valuable.

First, there is the importance of partnership. No single body – not UNESCO, not the whole UN system – can do ESD on its own. Closely linked to the idea of sustainability is the concept of inter-dependence, which demands that we work together to overcome shared problems. We must act quickly and that means we must partner together quickly too.

We sometimes talk loosely of ‘multi-stakeholder partnerships’ but ESD is one of those areas where such partnerships are essential. We know that, together, we can actually do something in and through education in order to create a safer and more sustainable world.

UNESCO has always emphasized the important role civil society has to play in mobilizing enthusiasm and commitment for ESD, and appreciates the valuable contribution of the Earth Charter initiative.

Second, there is the key role of teachers and educators, who are the cornerstone of effective ESD programmes. There are over 60 million teachers in the world today and countless numbers of non-formal educators. They work at the ‘local’ level but are called upon to deal with ‘global’ issues. To make education relevant and real to learners, they must draw upon local inputs, contexts and values.

Hence, we need to remember that teachers are individuals, part of educational and learning institutions, part of a community, and part of a society, and that they need to be supported in their work.

Third, it is vital to understand that the ESD approach is not limited to particular topics or even curriculum content in general, but offers a larger vision of what are the purpose and objectives of education, what is the relevance of education, what is the environment within which learning takes place, what kinds of values and principles are imparted and what types of skills, competences, behaviours and attitudes are generated. ESD has something important to say to all of these considerations, which coalesce around the question of quality.

We recognize that the 'education' in ESD is not just formal schooling but embraces a wide range of learning experiences and programmes. The focus on basic education and literacy in the orientation of the Decade is important. Yet ESD must also inform secondary education, technical and vocational training, and higher education, and a wide range of other modalities of learning that may be labelled as non-formal education, professional development and training.

We believe that such an inclusive approach serves as a stimulus to improving the quality of education. That is:

- an education that is relevant to the key challenges of living in the twenty-first century;
- an education that empowers people to exercise their rights while also builds a stronger sense of responsibility;
- an education that ensures that a person is educated to think critically, to solve problems, to work in teams, to be analytical, to be confident about facing situations of ambiguity and difficulty in the workplace or in their lives; and finally,
- an education that cultivates good citizenship locally, nationally and globally.

ESD can contribute to this quality agenda in many important ways.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UN Decade on Education for Sustainable Development is a framework for partnership and collaboration, bringing together a great diversity of interests and concerns.

It is an instrument of mobilization and advocacy, through which governments, international organizations, civil

society, the private sector and local communities around the world can demonstrate their practical commitment to learning to live sustainably.

Thus, ESD has come to be seen as a process of learning how to make decisions that consider the long-term future of the economy, ecology and the equitable development of all communities. Building the capacity for such future-oriented thinking is a key task of education.

As facilitator of this Decade, UNESCO is assisting countries and regions develop educational plans and strategies that are relevant to their different realities and concerns. But no country is an island when it comes to sustainable development. In this regard, even islands are not islands! We do live in a truly interdependent world and an educational experience that ignores or denies this cannot prepare citizens for the reality of living on this small planet.

In conclusion, I would like to stress that each of us is an agent of change and that we can individually and together contribute to creating a better world. All of us have responsibility, whether at the local, national, regional or international level, for the implementation of the Decade. But I do not wish to make this duty sound

like a burden because it is quite the reverse – it is a way to express our creativity and our capacity for innovation as well as to enjoy working and living with others in common cause.

Let me once again express my gratitude to Germany for providing us with such a warm welcome and hospitality. I would also like to thank Japan for its offer to host the wrap-up meeting for the Decade in 2014. This is a very timely proposal from a country that was the prime mover behind the creation of the DESD.

It remains for me to express my hope that this conference fulfils its promise by providing a rich and rewarding experience to every participant and by convincing all of you – if you need to be convinced – that the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development is a key framework for cooperation to achieve a better, more sustainable and safer world.

Thank you.