

DG/2002/70

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Koïchiro Matsuura

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

on the occasion of the opening ceremony
of the UNESCO Centre of Information and Documentation in Belarus

Minsk, 8 July 2002

Mr Minister,
Mr Director of the UNESCO Centre of Information and Documentation,
Honourable Representatives of the Belarus Government,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with you here today on the occasion of the official opening of the UNESCO Centre of Information and Documentation in Belarus. This Centre now joins the family of information and documentation centres that exist across the world and operate under the responsibility of UNESCO.

The domain of information and documentation is becoming more and more important in the fields of education, science, culture and communication and, indeed, in the whole pattern of life and work in societies today, in keeping with the trends running through the information age in which we live.

I am confident that the opening of the UNESCO Centre of Information and Documentation will help to enlarge access to information materials published by the international community and will make it easier for users to get full information about the aims, challenges, spheres of activity and programmes that shape the work of the United Nations, UNESCO and other international organizations.

It is necessary to develop a clear understanding of the role of information and documentation services in a context that is both dynamic and complex, where publicly available information is growing constantly and where new information and communication technologies are transforming how we access, use and disseminate information. In such circumstances, the Centre must serve as a hub for promoting access to information in the public domain, which UNESCO believes is a vital dimension of a just information society with universal benefits.

The work of the Centre will be carried out using a range of facilities and methods, including free access to information and documentation, electronic searches of library catalogues, CD-ROMS and the Internet, the preparation of topic lists and digests, the organization of topic displays, and the undertaking of factual, analytical and other inquiries.

The Centre will also open up ways to promote regional and international cooperation in education, science, culture and communication by organizing seminars, conferences, round tables and workshops, in close association with the Belarusian Association of UNESCO Clubs.

In the near future, I also hope to see some fruitful outcomes of cooperation between Belarus and UNESCO through the Centre's active involvement in the UNESCO Memory of the World Programme that aims to better preserve information in digital form and to ensure access to the document heritage.

In view of the rich collections of manuscripts, documents and books accumulated over centuries and now held by the National Library of Belarus and other heritage institutions, I would like to encourage Belarus to continue its participation in the Memory of the World Programme. Within the framework of this Programme and its criteria, it is open to Belarus to identify and select a coherent group of outstanding materials that have significance for world history and will be of interest to other parts of the world. In this regard, I would also like to encourage the Belarus government authorities and the Centre to promote regional cooperation in order to facilitate access to the Belarusian archives, libraries and other storage collections of document heritage and to develop mutually beneficial contacts with relevant regional institutions.

The scope of the Centre's activities and the spirit of sharing, solidarity and service that animates its work show that concerted efforts to pursue "Information For All", one of UNESCO's key priorities, can make real advances. It is also evident that promoting access to information in the public domain can secure practical results. I am pleased that UNESCO's support has contributed to the Centre's achievements in these matters.

In conclusion, I congratulate everyone associated with the establishment and opening of the Centre. I wish the Centre every success in pursuing its present and future activities so that information and documentation become accessible to all.

Thank you.