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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
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Address by  
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Director-General  
of the United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization  
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the opening of the UNESCO International Meeting of Technical  
and Vocational Education and Training Experts:  
“Learning for Work, Citizenship and Sustainability”

Bonn, Germany, 25 October 2004

Madam Minister,  
Mr Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO,  
Mr Mayor,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Participants,  
Ladies and Gentleman,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here once again in Bonn and to open this conference, whose theme of “Learning for Work, Citizenship and Sustainability” combines both topicality and foresight. Let me warmly welcome all the participants to what promises to be a most stimulating event.

I was last here four years ago for the purpose of signing the agreement with Germany establishing the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training – the Bonn Centre. On that occasion, my co-signer was Madam Bulmahn and I am delighted that we are together again here today. I am also very pleased that Ambassador Wrede, the current Chairman of UNESCO’s Executive Board, has joined us for this event. He is the first German to hold this position in the lifetime of the Organization, which was founded almost sixty years ago, and he is an excellent Chairman.

Madam Minister,

I wish to thank you, the Federal Government of Germany and the City of Bonn for hosting this important UNESCO international meeting of TVET experts. This is not an isolated occasion, of course, for it fits into a pattern of strong support to UNESCO’s work in the field of TVET sustained over many years. Your support for the Bonn Centre in particular is greatly appreciated, not only by UNESCO but also by the many countries, especially in the developing world, that benefit from its services.

The main focus of the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre is upon capacity-building and technical assistance with a view to promoting innovation and best practices in TVET, developing TVET systems, improving access to TVET and assuring the quality of TVET. In addition, of course, the Bonn Centre is at the heart of the UNEVOC Network, with its 225 specialized TVET institutions across 154 UNESCO Member States.

Germany’s long-standing tradition of TVET was undoubtedly one of the factors contributing to its industrial success in the last two centuries. By hosting the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre in Bonn, Germany indicates its willingness to share its experience and expertise in TVET with the rest of the world.

Germany has long been in the vanguard of TVET developments and this remains true today. Now, in the early years of the twenty-first century, Germany is at the forefront of the movement towards sustainable development. By helping to bring both of these concerns together, Germany is demonstrating its sense of relevance and its clarity of vision of the way ahead.

For its part, one of UNESCO's basic roles is to provide a platform for international cooperation and this meeting in Bonn is designed to serve this purpose. It is an opportunity for education policy-makers and TVET specialists from around the world to join together in common cause to re-orient TVET so that it is in harmony with the tenets of sustainable development. In order to understand why this agenda has arisen, let me now look briefly at the background to this conference.

You may recall that UNESCO convened the Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education in Seoul, Republic of Korea, in April 1999. On that occasion, 40 Ministers of Education were among the more than 700 participants who met to discuss how the field of TVET should adjust in order to meet the challenges of the world of work in the early years of the twenty-first century.

The Seoul Congress generated a set of recommendations on how the field of TVET needed to adapt to the new global situation. UNESCO used these recommendations to update its normative instrument or standard-setting document concerning Technical and Vocational Education. UNESCO's *Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education (2001)* was adopted by the Organization's General Conference at its 31st session.

This meeting in Bonn, which marks five years since the Seoul Congress, has two main purposes. First, it will attempt to assess the extent to which TVET systems in UNESCO's Member States have benefited from the outcomes of the Seoul Congress and the Organization's updated normative instrument.

Second, it will seek to stimulate discussion on how TVET may contribute to sustainable development world-wide. The very title of the meeting – "Learning for Work, Citizenship and Sustainability" - encapsulates the key precepts of sustainable development and touches on its three major domains – economy, society and ecology. The conclusions of this meeting in Bonn will provide an important contribution to the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, which will commence in 2005 and for which UNESCO is the lead agency.

Madam Minister,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The challenge of sustainable development looks set to become one of the dominant themes of international cooperation in the twenty-first century. This reflects our fundamental interdependence in a dynamic world that requires constant adaptation from each of us, without exception. The key to this adaptability is education, the vital tool for updating our knowledge, enhancing our capacities and skills, learning to live together with our differences and attuning ourselves to changing values, beliefs and life-styles.

The international community's recognition that education is central to achieving sustainable development was a clear outcome of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This consensus was strongly reinforced at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg two years ago. The United Nations General Assembly, in follow-up to Johannesburg, has declared the new Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2104) in order to galvanize the international community into taking urgent and enhanced action to educate the world's population about sustainable development and to encourage the wider practice of sustainability.

This growing focus on education, in its broadest sense and taking in the different types and levels of organized education, including TVET, is a clear trend within the sustainable development debate. It is now widely agreed that achieving sustainable development is essentially a process of learning. In recent centuries, we learned to live in an unsustainable way – and thereby created the social and environmental problems the world is currently facing. Today, we need to learn how to live together as communities in harmony and to work in ways that are sustainable. This implies a model of development that alleviates poverty, that includes the well-being of all segments of the community and ensures the conservation of the natural environment.

It is in this perspective that, through a re-orientation of TVET, learning for work and learning for citizenship must be integrally related to learning for sustainable development. Let me now look briefly at each of these key themes of your meeting.

Work is a major feature in most people's lives. Not only does it provide them with the means of subsistence in terms of food, clothing and shelter, but the type of work undertaken by individuals also has a major impact on their identity, social status and standard of living.

In the developed countries, most work opportunities in the twenty-first century are likely to be centred on new processes and services that require specialized knowledge and skills not yet available in general education institutions. TVET will be required to meet these needs. In developing countries, there will be an accelerating

process of diversification of employment opportunities, although rural agricultural work will continue to prevail in many economies. TVET will be required to meet these needs too. Non-formal TVET, for example, will be needed to help alleviate the poverty of rural communities by helping to add value to agricultural products. TVET, in other words, can be expected to play a useful role in both developed and developing countries by providing people with more choices in their lives.

To continue providing real benefits, however, TVET must respond to the changing world of work and its insistent demands for learning and re-learning throughout the life-span. It must respond to changes in the meaning and practice of work in knowledge economies and in globalized networks of production and trade linking rich and poor countries alike. TVET, of course, cannot just be reactive but must itself become a force for positive change at work, whether this means breaking down gender barriers, empowering the excluded or addressing ethical issues relating to the uses of technology.

In a globalizing world, we must also re-visit our understanding of citizenship. It can no longer be narrowly political or narrowly national in scope but must embrace a wider conception of our rights, freedoms and responsibilities. The challenge of sustainable development gives fresh meaning to the notion of global citizenship. At the same time, it forces us to look at the practical exercise of democratic citizenship differently – not as an occasional visit to the polling station but involving, on a daily basis, choices about what we consume, how we dispose of our waste, where we work, what means of travel and communication we use, and how we interact with our fellow citizens and neighbours.

If sustainable development requires committed, active and knowledgeable citizens, it also requires caring and informed decision-makers capable of making the right choices about the complex and inter-related issues facing human society. Education for sustainable development, in fact, must embrace not only specific education and training programmes but also the use of policy and legislation as opportunities for teaching and encouraging new forms of personal, community and corporate behaviour. TVET can and must contribute to this broader education of public opinion as well as cater to the learning needs of particular groups. In doing so, TVET will become increasingly integrated into, and make a stronger contribution to, the wider process of Education for All (EFA) and its interface with the challenge of sustainable development.

Madam Minister,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

These remarks show that I am convinced of the enduring, indeed growing, importance of TVET for work, sustainability and responsible citizenship in the world

of today and tomorrow. This Experts' Meeting on TVET is an opportunity to re-examine the key issues on this agenda. Some of those issues concern the kinds of learning that TVET must increasingly address if the principles of sustainability and citizenship are to be applied. They also concern the types of partnerships, especially between the state, business and industry, appropriate to the new forms and modalities of TVET that will emerge.

Above all, I believe that this conference will show that the challenge of sustainable development is inseparable from the challenge of building equitable knowledge societies based on lifelong learning. For TVET programmes to be part of the solution and not part of the problem, they must be re-oriented so that they contribute to sustainable development worldwide.

It remains for me to wish you every success in your important deliberations. I look forward to being informed of the outcomes of your discussions.

Thank you.