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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 launching of a Literacy Campaign named  
“Each-One-Teach-Ten,” during his official visit to Monrovia, Liberia

Monrovia, Liberia, 26 November 2004

Honourable Minister,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted and honoured to be with you today in Monrovia at the invitation of the National Transitional Government. I would like to express my gratitude to Her Excellency Mrs Evelyn S. Kandakai for inviting me to take part in the launching ceremony of the Literacy Campaign “Each-One-Teach-Ten.”

Building on the success of the Literacy Campaign Programme Each-One-Teach-One, this initiative is timely, necessary and useful. It is based on the voluntary principle, which is most effective at the community level. In addition, it fulfils one of the essential ideas permeating literacy programmes today all over the world, namely, that literacy is everyone’s responsibility. The Each-One-Teach-Ten Programme is proof that each of us can do something positive for literacy. At the same time, we must recognize that our individual efforts will be limited unless they are joined with the efforts of others.

UNESCO strongly supports this initiative and will provide some practical help where needed, in the first instance through the establishment of a pilot multi-media centre in each of the three regions at the county level and resource centres at the district level. UNESCO believes that, of equal importance to initial literacy programmes are post-literacy programmes which help to create follow-up so that literacy capacities can be used and developed. The key to this is the creation of a literate environment in which new literates can be supported with materials, a place to go and encouragement. They need access to literacy facilities or services available at little or no private cost.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Liberia is not alone in having a problem of illiteracy, of course. The latest figures from the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 estimate that there are approximately 800 million illiterate people around the world, two-thirds of whom are women. In the twenty-first century, this is utterly unacceptable, as was recognized at the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, four and half years ago. UNESCO is the lead coordinating agency for the EFA drive at the international level. In addition, as the agency which has long been involved in promoting literacy, post-literacy and related non-formal education programmes, UNESCO was chosen to be the coordinating agency for the UN Literacy Decade launched in 2003. Your work on Each-One-Teach-One and Each-One Teach-Ten fits into this larger frame of reference, whose eventual aim is to create a fully literate world.

I would encourage you to see your literacy efforts as fitting into this larger framework of Education for All (EFA) and the UN Literacy Decade. At the same time, literacy is an essential part of the development agenda and is linked positively with women's empowerment, poverty eradication, income generation, improved living standards and health care, the struggle against HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases, environmental protection, and many other real advances that bring practical benefits to people's lives.

I would like to place special emphasis on women. There is abundant evidence pointing to the catalytic role of women's literacy, not least for helping their children's development from early childhood onwards. It is vital, however, not only to focus attention on the literacy needs of women and girls but also to ensure that literacy programmes are gender sensitive in ways that are beneficial to learners of both sexes. This emphasis is being integrated into the design of a new UNESCO programme called LIFE – Literacy Initiative for the Excluded.

Africa is a priority for UNESCO. And, given the Organization's focus on the reconstruction of education systems in post-conflict countries, Liberia has become a priority. UNESCO is committed to helping Liberia achieve its goals.

For countries like Liberia that are coming out of a dark period, literacy is a beacon of light showing the way toward better times for individuals, communities and society as a whole. I therefore commend the Liberian authorities and the people of Liberia for choosing to make literacy a key national goal. Once again, I assure you of UNESCO's support. Through a partnership involving the government, civil society and international agencies, we must work hard to ensure that the word "illiterate" is eradicated from our vocabulary. I wish you every success with the programme Each-One-Teach-Ten.

Thank you.