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on the occasion of the Information Meeting for Permanent Delegates  
on Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) - Outcomes of the SIDS Mauritius  
Meeting and Implications for UNESCO – and on UNESCO's responses to the Indian  
Ocean Catastrophe, including the results of the World Conference on Disaster  
Reduction (WCDR) in Kobe, Japan (18-22 January 2005)

UNESCO, 10 February 2005

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this Information Meeting, which has a rich and full agenda. The first part of this agenda relates to the International Meeting to Review Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), that took place in Mauritius from 10 to 14 January 2005.

UNESCO's engagement with this event and its preparation has flowed from resolution 32 C/Res 48 adopted by the General Conference in October 2003. I am pleased to inform you that we participated actively in the review and forward-planning process leading up to the Mauritius meeting, including various preparatory activities organized by the UN and AOSIS (Alliance of Small Island States).

House-wide inputs into this process were orchestrated by the Coastal Regions and Small Islands (CSI) Platform. We set up a dedicated cross-sectoral website and several publications were prepared, including the booklet 'Island Agenda 2004+' which, along with several others, can be found in the folders distributed to you.

One year ago, in February 2004, I established the intersectoral Working Group on SIDS, with ADG/Science as Chair. Among the joint meetings that were held was that in May of last year with the Paris-based Group of SIDS Ambassadors and Permanent Delegates, chaired by Ambassador Dilmahomed. Meanwhile, regular planning meetings were convened involving headquarters staff and colleagues from key field offices in the SIDS regions, using conference call facilities.

UNESCO has assigned particular importance to the building of bridges and networks of various kinds in order to promote effective intersectoral, interregional and, indeed, intergenerational cooperation. In the preparatory process, the Organization also took on special responsibilities in highlighting the importance of such perspectives as culture, education and youth in working towards a new vision and commitment for small islands.

Let me now turn to the Mauritius meeting itself. As you can imagine, the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster featured prominently in delegates' minds and interventions. The particular vulnerability of small island developing states was repeatedly stressed. During my visit to Mauritius, I made public statements announcing UNESCO's intention to set up a global early warning system for tsunamis, with priority focus on establishing a regional system for the Indian Ocean.

Subsequently, I was pleased to note that the Phuket Ministerial Declaration on Regional Cooperation on Tsunami Early Warning Arrangements (29 January 2005)

made pointed references to the Mauritius meeting and its Strategy in the context of investing in preparedness, promoting sustainable development and reducing vulnerability to natural disasters of all kinds.

In Mauritius, it was a pleasure to see at first hand some of UNESCO's direct contributions to the events that had been organized. With UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Mrs Annan, I took part in the closing session of the UNESCO-facilitated event on "Youth Visioning for Island Living", which brought together almost one hundred young people from 31 SIDS and six other island nations and territories. We learnt something about the young people's hopes and aspirations as well as their commitment to undertake follow-up activities in their various island homes. Earlier, representatives of the young people had presented their Declaration to the Plenary session of the main meeting.

The principal negotiated outputs of the Mauritius International Meeting are contained in two documents in your folders – the 30-page Mauritius Strategy and the 20-paragraph Mauritius Declaration. Together, they call for action in many fields related to UNESCO's programmes and priorities, ranging from sea-level change, biodiversity conservation and natural disasters to HIV/AIDS, education for sustainable development, ICTs and cultural industries.

The Declaration also expresses appreciation for the efforts of the United Nations and its specialized agencies in helping to advance the sustainable development of small island developing states, and invites them to strengthen their support to the Mauritius Strategy through enhanced coherence and coordination.

What, then, are the main implications for UNESCO of the Mauritius meeting and its outcomes? A two-pronged response strategy would seem desirable from the UNESCO side. First, a mainstreaming approach should be taken to address the needs of SIDS in all the Organization's activities. Second, UNESCO should continue to promote holistic, integrated approaches to sustainable living and development in SIDS. This will require further intersectorality, in conjunction with inter-regional cooperation and the building of partnerships and collaboration with other bodies, within and outside the United Nations system.

Rather than go into detail today on the form our follow-up will take, I propose that a separate information meeting on Mauritius and its implications should be convened by ADG/SC as soon as possible, especially but not exclusively for the benefit of Permanent Delegations of SIDS. Be assured that UNESCO will be at the side of the Small Island Developing States and their partners as they address the work ahead.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the question of our response to the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster. UNESCO has fought very hard to ensure its rightful place at the centre of any process aimed at establishing tsunami early warning systems, whether regionally or globally. We have put our case forcibly and persuasively, and I believe we have been heard.

In my message to the High-Level Segment of the Mauritius meeting, I not only announced a strategy for the immediate establishment of the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System but I also outlined a strategy to build a Global Tsunami Warning System that would cover the needs of other regions at risk, such as the Caribbean, the Mediterranean and the South West Pacific. I also set up a calendar of key events to help the international community to move in this direction.

As a result of this, UNESCO through its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) has been increasingly recognized as the leading agency for the international coordination of these systems, a recognition that is based on the fact that the IOC of UNESCO established in 1968 and now runs the only existing regional tsunami warning system: that which operates in the Pacific Ocean.

The special ASEAN leader's meeting held in Jakarta, Indonesia, on 6 January 2005, attended by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, not only addressed the immediate humanitarian crisis and the planning for the rehabilitation and reconstruction phase, but also called for the "establishment of a regional tsunami early warning system for the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia region".

In light of the 26 December disaster, the Programme of the World Conference on Disaster Reduction (Kobe, Japan, 19-22 January 2005), was modified to include several tsunami-related activities, in particular a Thematic Special Session organized jointly by the Japanese Meteorological Agency and the IOC of UNESCO, and a "Special Plenary Session on the Indian Ocean Disaster: Risk Reduction for a Safer Future". This Plenary Session adopted a negotiated Common Statement that, in one of its operative paragraphs, "recognizes the need to use the experience of the existing Pacific Ocean tsunami early warning systems, making use of the existing coordination mechanisms of the IOC and other relevant international and regional organizations...". This clearly acknowledges the accomplishment of UNESCO/IOC in the Pacific Ocean region and provides a clear mandate to UNESCO/IOC for the Indian Ocean.

Following the Kobe Conference, another important event took place, namely, the Ministerial Meeting on Regional Cooperation on Tsunami Early Warning Arrangements, convened by the Government of Thailand in Phuket on 29 January

2005. This Ministerial Meeting decided “to take immediate and practical steps to enhance early warning capabilities in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia and to cooperate towards the establishment of interim early warning arrangements and strengthening and upgrading of national systems, while moving towards a coordinated regional system.” The Ministerial Meeting agreed, furthermore, that a regional early warning system “shall be developed within the UN’s international strategy coordinated by the IOC of UNESCO”.

In order to coordinate and, if possible, harmonise the many initiatives advanced by different organizations and countries, UNESCO/IOC will host on 3-8 March 2005 at UNESCO Headquarters the “International Coordination Meeting for the Development of a Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System for the Indian Ocean within a global framework”. I am addressing an invitation to all Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Indian Ocean countries, as well as to IOC focal points in all UNESCO’s Member States, to request the active participation of technical experts of their countries in this meeting.

The coordination meeting will seek to do two things. First, it will endeavour to produce a draft work plan and timetable for the establishment of the Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System for the Indian Ocean. The establishment will be expedited for two reasons: the countries and organizations presently dealing with the immediate impact of the 26 December disaster have more or less reached a consensus on the need to establish such a system; and those countries are participants in the Indian Ocean Global Ocean Observing System (IOGOOS), established by an agreement signed in Mauritius in 2002 under the auspices of UNESCO. Given that IOGOOS is an existing regional platform that has much potential for moving towards comprehensive ocean measurement and forecasting in the Indian Ocean, it could, in our view, be an important foundation on which the tsunami early warning system for the region can be built.

Secondly, the March coordination meeting will seek to produce a Draft Design Plan for a global tsunami warning system, of which the Indian Ocean system would be one component. Session 6 of the meeting will discuss not only the linkages to existing warning systems and initiatives such as the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), but also the various regional components that would be the constituent parts of the global system. In this context, the existing UNESCO/IOC proposal for “An Intra-Americas Sea Tsunami Warning System”, developed in 2002 and destined for the Caribbean region, will be examined, as will proposals for other regions at risk such as the Mediterranean, the Atlantic and the South West Pacific regions. Once agreement is reached on a Draft Design Plan for a global tsunami warning system, we will start organising regional coordination meetings such as the one for the Indian Ocean in order to finalise workplans and reach policy consensus. It is my hope that the first such meeting, which we believe will be for the Caribbean, should be held during the second half of this year.

I would also like to acknowledge the invitation that UNESCO/IOC has received to participate in a meeting organized by the European Commission's Directorate of Research, which is planned to be held in Brussels on 28 February. The meeting has two main purposes: first, to create a balance of European research efforts in early warning, especially concentrating on the tsunami risk for the Mediterranean region, and, second, to assess existing networks in the Mediterranean and the adjacent Atlantic Ocean. GLOSS, the global sea-level network of IOC, will report on the existing sea-level network in that region.

It is UNESCO's clear vision that all regional tsunami warning systems should come under the umbrella of the global system. The aim is to have the global system in place by June 2007. In this regard, please note that UNESCO-IOC will make a presentation on building the Indian Ocean early warning system for tsunamis at the GEO-Group meeting in Brussels on 14-15 February. We are also invited to participate in the Third Earth Observation Summit on GEOSS on 16 February in Brussels. This ministerial meeting is most timely as the global tsunami system must form part of GEOSS. A joint statement by several Heads of Agencies, including UNESCO, will be made in support of the GEOSS process.

Returning to the Indian Ocean warning system, allow me to give you further information about the scenario and timeline we have in mind. Subsequent to the 3-8 March meeting, hopefully in April, UNESCO will convene a further meeting with the Indian Ocean countries at a policy level which will seek to reach agreement on how the Indian Ocean early warning system can be organized and brought into effect. The results of this meeting will be fed into the preparation of the draft workplan for the Indian Ocean early warning system, which will then be presented to the IOC General Assembly meeting in June this year for discussion and eventual adoption. If this timetable is respected, and I am confident that it will, a preliminary system should be in place in the Indian Ocean by June 2006, with the full-fledged system being realised by late 2007.

In this regard, I would like to stress the importance for UNESCO of working within UN-wide processes of collaboration, in particular with such key partners as ISDR, WMO and UNEP. That is why we sought endorsement for our approach from UN Oceans, which is composed of 16 UN agencies. In addition, I am personally in constant touch with Secretary-General Kofi Annan, explaining to him what steps we plan to take. We had a long telephone conversation on the subject of tsunamis recently, on 3 February to be precise.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Kobe Conference, of course, was not devoted only to the question of tsunamis. It should be recalled that the holding of this Conference followed a

Resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly more than a year ago expressing deep concern at the number and scale of natural disasters and their increasing impact within recent years. In the shadow of the Indian Ocean disaster of 26 December, 4000 participants met in Kobe representing 168 States, 78 United Nations bodies and other organizations, 161 NGOs and as many media. The Conference concluded with a unanimous commitment to reducing disaster risk as an intrinsic element of sustainable development. It has affirmed that a culture of disaster prevention and resilience must be fostered at all levels. Furthermore, it recognized the relationship between disaster reduction, sustainable development and poverty reduction.

The Kobe Conference adopted three important documents:

- The Hyogo Declaration;
- The Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015;
- The Common Statement on the Indian Ocean Disaster.

The Framework for Action represents a substantive set of objectives aimed at ensuring that the world reduces risk and vulnerabilities to natural hazards in the next ten years. It calls on states to put disaster risk at the centre of political agendas and national policies. This Framework for Action will be expected to strengthen the capacity of disaster-prone countries to address risk and invest heavily in disaster preparedness.

The outcome of Kobe calls on the international community and international organizations to pursue an integrated multi-hazard approach for sustainable development to reduce the incidence and severity of disasters. UNESCO is considered as an important stakeholder in this context. In addition to the proposals concerning tsunami early warning systems, several initiatives that are being promoted by UNESCO were highlighted in Kobe, including :

- an international flood initiative involving UNESCO, WMO, the United Nations University, the UN-ISDR and the International Association of Hydrological Sciences. The headquarters for the new project will be based at a planned Centre for Water Hazard and Risk Management (CHARM) to be hosted by the Public Works Research Institute in Tsukuba;
- a “Coalition on Education” led by UNESCO, which will take the lead in integrating disaster reduction education into school programmes and in making school buildings safer. This initiative was promoted by UNESCO, well ahead of the Kobe Conference; it represents a contribution to the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

- an open Alliance to support earthquake risk reduction and disaster management planning in megacities.

During the Kobe Conference, UNESCO co-organized with various organizations and institutions four thematic sessions on i) education for sustainable development: towards effective disaster reduction and enhancing human security; ii) cultural heritage risk management; iii) new international initiatives for research and risk mitigation of floods and landslides; and iv) promotion of tsunami disaster mitigation in the Indian Ocean: towards the establishment of tsunami early warning systems in the Indian Ocean. UNESCO also co-sponsored, and took part in, a number of other thematic sessions. It may be noted, furthermore, that the Hyogo Framework for Action gave priority to the intersectoral Thematic Cluster “Knowledge, Innovation and Education - building a culture of resilient communities”, a cluster in which UNESCO acts as a lead agency.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me now turn to the question of UNESCO’s post-tsunami response regarding the challenges of recovery and reconstruction. Beyond disaster prevention, UNESCO stands ready to make a substantive contribution to the overall UN recovery and reconstruction efforts, in areas to which we bring clear “added value”. This is an enormous challenge for UNESCO, given the unprecedented scale of the human suffering and material devastation that occurred. It is also a duty for the Organization, given the issues at stake: educational services have been disrupted; biological diversity has suffered considerable loss; cultural heritage – tangible and especially intangible – is at risk; and media infrastructure has been destroyed, thus leaving communities in isolation at precisely the moment when information is essential.

To tackle these issues, UNESCO will focus on the following priorities:

- (i) proposing temporary alternative educational services to assist the worst-affected communities, with a special focus on the post-trauma counseling role that education must play;
- (ii) restoring both biological and cultural diversity, and closely interlinking these two elements, in particular as far as indigenous and minority populations are concerned. Restoring cultural diversity in the post-tsunami context means also preserving memory and identity, where archives and libraries have been severely damaged;
- (iii) promoting integrated water management to avoid fresh water contamination and the sanitary risk it implies.

Besides disaster prevention, these are the strategic areas where UNESCO will be providing advice, assistance and expertise to the national authorities and communities of affected countries in the design and implementation of their recovery and reconstruction plans. In these country-driven efforts, we are acting locally through our field offices, namely, the Bangkok, Jakarta and New Delhi offices, and coordinating globally through the Taskforce on Emergency Response to the Tsunami Crisis, which I established in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Under the leadership of ADG/SC, the Taskforce, composed of senior staff from field offices concerned, programme sectors and central services, advises on the overall strategic niches, as well as the concrete operational modalities, for our contribution to post-tsunami recovery and reconstruction. The taskforce is meeting on a weekly basis, thus ensuring regular sharing of information, collective stocktaking and early responsiveness to any new developments that may impact on our action at the country-level.

We have begun some operational activities in Indonesia – we have established a voluntary teacher training centre (thanks to the generous support of Mrs Ohoven's Children in Need Foundation). In addition, we have arranged for the provision of local radio equipment and also of transitional temporary educational services using performance arts to assist in the healing of trauma among children and young people. To support these activities, we have drawn upon diverse sources, including a Special Account for Developing Countries.

Allow me now to further elaborate on our concrete operational priorities. In the affected countries, we are witnessing a progressive shift from humanitarian emergency activities towards longer-term recovery and reconstruction efforts. In keeping with other UN agencies, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, UNESCO is currently actively involved in a number of in-depth assessments, particularly in the fields of education, culture and environment. It is our hope that, through our participation in such exercises, education, culture, environmental concerns and media development will be integrated into the reconstruction processes, especially in the most affected countries and communities.

To succeed in this, we need to be present on the ground. I have therefore taken the necessary steps to temporarily strengthen the UNESCO Jakarta office and to establish – for an initial period of three months - a UNESCO antenna in Colombo (Sri Lanka). I am glad to announce that our colleague Martin Hadlow has accepted the challenging task of serving as Head of the antenna. Mr. Hadlow is currently Acting Director of the Bureau for Public Information. As many of you will recall, he was recently based in Afghanistan, where he established and led with much success our operations for more than three years. I am confident that, thanks to Mr. Hadlow's extensive experience in serving in countries engaged in processes of recovery and reconstruction, UNESCO will be able to further extend our assistance to government authorities and local communities in Sri Lanka. The antenna will also be staffed with

an assistant programme specialist in education, temporarily seconded from the UNESCO Bangkok office.

Our strengthened operational capacity and current involvement in in-depth sectoral assessments, augurs well – I believe – for a substantial longer-term assistance to tsunami-affected countries. To make our assistance a success, the main challenge we are currently facing is funding. As explained to the members of the Executive Board during the recent information session, UNESCO refrained from participating in the humanitarian “Flash Appeal”, which was released by OCHA in early January, as our assistance would focus on the subsequent recovery and reconstruction phases. We now witness the signals that such phases are starting: priorities are being redefined at the country-level in order to integrate recovery and reconstruction and UNESCO stands ready to engage with this effort. In this context, I wish to thank Member States and private individuals who have already provided financial contributions - or indicated their intention to do so – for post-tsunami projects. In this regard, I also wish to bring your attention to the fact that I have created a Tsunami Special Account, which is announced on the tsunami portal on the UNESCO website. Contributions from governments, organizations and individuals are most welcome.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During this presentation, I have dealt with three main questions: first, the SIDS meeting in Mauritius; second, the Kobe Conference and related developments; and, third, our tsunami and post-tsunami action. In a moment, I will ask the Assistant Director-General for IOC, Patricio Bernal, to give a short powerpoint presentation on tsunamis. In the question-and-answer period that will follow, I would suggest that we focus on natural disaster-related issues, leaving the SIDS-related issues to be addressed through an exchange of views at the forthcoming information meeting.

Thank you.