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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
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Address by
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Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the signature of
the Agreement between UNESCO and the United States National Aeronautics and
Space Administration (NASA)

Washington DC, 1 March 2005

Mr Deputy Administrator,
Madame Ambassador,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here today at NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) Headquarters for the signing of the Agreement between NASA and UNESCO for cooperation on the World Heritage Conservation, Monitoring of Biosphere Reserves and Natural Hazards, and Space Earth Science Education, Capacity-Building and Outreach Activities. Let me thank you, Mr Deputy Administrator, and your staff for the warm welcome we have received.

I will not review here all the background leading up to the making of this Agreement. But I would like to stress the importance of four recent meetings that have shaped our mutual agendas: the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002 and the three Earth Observation Summits. At Johannesburg, UNESCO and the European Space Agency, serving as co-chairs of the Integrated Global Observing Strategy Partnership (IGOS), brought to the attention of the highest level of policy-makers the role that Earth observation information plays in the planning of sustainable development.

At the first World Summit on Earth Observation, held in Washington DC in July 2003, we discussed the essential elements of a 10-year plan to create a sustainable and operational observing system to assist policy-makers, especially in developing countries, in the preparation of environmentally sound economic development plans.

At the second Earth Observation Summit in April 2004 in Tokyo, UNESCO stressed the need to give special attention to the strengthening of *in situ* Earth observation systems all over the world. Special efforts are necessary to further reinforce the dialogue between all actors in Earth observation, which in turn will lead to a better use of satellite data, especially in developing countries. These countries are remotely sensed by satellites but have only limited access to the resultant data, or else they need support in analysing the information collected in order to turn it into products that decision-makers can use. We thus urgently need to strengthen training and capacity-building activities in the developing world.

UNESCO actively cooperates with space agencies for the development of the 10-year Implementation Plan for the creation of the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) and we are very pleased that the plan was adopted by 60 countries and the 25 organizations that participated in the third Earth Observation Summit in February this year in Brussels. The Implementation Plan specifically calls on UNESCO to assist GEOSS in organizing the necessary training, education and

outreach activities in particular because we are lead agency for the 2005-2014 Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Agreement signed today will greatly strengthen the cooperation between NASA and UNESCO. I would like to acknowledge the personal interest that Ambassador Louise Oliver took in the finalization of this Agreement. Her assistance in facilitating the contacts with NASA and the relevant government departments is greatly appreciated by UNESCO.

The Agreement focuses on four particular areas of interest, namely, cooperation in the fields of:

- World Heritage Conservation,
- Monitoring of Biosphere Reserves,
- Natural Hazards Studies,
- Education, Capacity-building and Outreach.

The Agreement is not restricted to providing data from NASA Earth observation satellites for the study of specific locations on Earth. The Agreement has a much wider scope and concerns also the analysis, modelling and interpretation of remote sensing data. The cooperation between our two Organizations will make it possible for managers and decision-makers to have access to the most modern and advanced research and data fusion tools, to produce simulations and to utilize the newest predictive capabilities in support of decision-making for the economic development of World Heritage Sites and Biosphere Reserves.

UNESCO is in particular concerned with bringing the benefits of Earth science and space technologies to Member States that currently have no access to them. All countries of the world need to be able to participate in the use of these technologies to improve the conservation of their natural and cultural heritage.

I trust that thanks to this NASA-UNESCO cooperation, monitoring and management of the World Heritage Sites and Biosphere Reserves will be done in a more efficient and cost effective manner and will lead to an improved interaction between nature and humankind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like now to briefly address the field of natural hazards. In particular regard to the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster, the Secretariat of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) has begun to coordinate the activities which will soon create effective tsunami and multi-hazard warning systems in the Indian Ocean as well as worldwide.

In addition, other programmes of UNESCO, such as the Geological Application of Remote Sensing Programme (GARS), are cooperating with space agencies and geological surveys such as the United States Geological Survey (USGS), in the framework of IGOS and GEOSS. Their focus is upon an improved integration of satellite and in situ observations in order to mitigate the negative effects of geologically induced natural hazards such as earthquakes, volcanoes, landslides and land subsidence. We look forward to further strengthening our collaboration with NASA in this important field of natural hazard reduction and disaster prevention, especially because of the high cost of disasters, which impedes the development of the world's poorest nations.

Furthermore, in line with the recommendations of the World Conference on Science held in Budapest in 1999, I would like to stress the importance of science education. It is imperative to kindle the interest of all parts of civil society and involve them in scientific progress. UNESCO shares the commitment of the United States to science education and it is an area in which we work closely together.

UNESCO, in cooperation with the space agencies, is making a special effort to introduce space issues, such as basic space science and observation from satellites, into the curriculum of secondary school systems and universities, thus bringing a new dimension and perspective into science education. This should encourage young people to be more interested in science subjects and in turn more students should select science and engineering courses in their university education.

We look forward in our Space Education Programme (SEP) to collaborating with NASA. SEP provides a platform for common activities to be implemented and a vehicle to prepare the next generation of the space workforce. Currently, UNESCO is co-chairing the education and capacity-building working group of the Space Agencies Committee on Earth Observation Satellites (CEOS). In this context, we look forward to cooperating with NASA to strengthen public interest in scientific and technological subjects, including space programmes and their benefits for mankind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to express my thanks to NASA for having organized this ceremony to celebrate the signing of the Agreement between our two Organizations. I look forward to strengthened and efficient cooperation in the future and the implementation of joint activities, projects and programmes within the framework of the Agreement.

Thank you.