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Organización
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联合国教育、
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Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,

Director-General of UNESCO,

on the occasion of the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

17 October 2007

This International Day marks a turning point in many respects. Twenty years ago, on 17 October 1987, thousands of people gathered together on the Human Rights Esplanade, at the Place du Trocadero in Paris, to express through messages and testimonies their determination to overcome the scourge of poverty and their solidarity with its victims. Fifteen years ago, in 1992, the United Nations General Assembly joined that movement by proclaiming 17 October as International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

Where are we today? Admittedly, at the end of the First United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006), the global figures showed significant progress. The fight against poverty is now central to the efforts of governments and international organizations. On the threshold of the millennium, the Heads of State and government of 189 countries undertook to reduce by half the proportion of people living in poverty by 2015. However, everywhere in the world, the most vulnerable groups remain threatened by pauperization, if not faced with destitution or exclusion. Nearly a billion people still live on less than one dollar a day, more than one adult in four, two thirds of whom are women, can neither read nor write, and each day 50,000 die of acute deprivation. We have the means to change this.

It was precisely in order to change the situation that the United Nations Millennium Campaign, launched in 2002 by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, issued on the occasion of the International Day an appeal for the mass mobilization of the international community, including civil society, so that millions of people throughout the world could make their voices heard in favour of the Millennium Development Goals.

I fully support this initiative. The target date of 2015 is approaching and there is no time to lose in this combat. We must ensure that the Millennium Goals remain

the top priorities of the Member States and continue to guide our action, and that of our partners in civil society, against what constitutes an unacceptable violation of human rights and dignity.

For UNESCO, this year also marks the conclusion of the Medium-Term Strategy for 2002-2007 in which the Organization included the eradication of poverty, especially extreme poverty, as a major cross-cutting theme traversing all its programmes. Following an interdisciplinary course, which has found practical expression in some 40 pilot projects drawing on all its fields of competence, it has supported the formulation of public policies for development and cooperation in an approach centred on human rights as a tool for the alleviation of poverty.

This intersectoral procedure will continue to nurture UNESCO's Strategy for the coming six years. By working for the education of the most vulnerable groups, the safeguarding of the cultural and natural heritage for sustainable development, and access to information to break the isolation of the most underprivileged, and by promoting the use of science, technology and innovation in support of inclusive knowledge societies, the Organization will continue to make the fight against poverty the main focus of its action and will strive to make a practical contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Goals.

This International Day provides us once again with an opportunity to proclaim loudly and clearly our rejection of extreme poverty.

Koichiro Matsuura