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**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the Information Meeting
for Permanent Delegates and Observers
to UNESCO on the EFA High-Level Group**

UNESCO, 20 December 2007

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The EFA High-Level Group met for the seventh time last week from 11 to 13 December in Dakar, Senegal, at the invitation of the Senegalese Government, whose hospitality we very much appreciated. It was a most symbolic location, the same city where seven and half years ago participants at the World Education Forum committed to achieving Education for All. It was also an important moment, midway towards the 2015 target date for achieving the six Dakar goals.

As in 2000, President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal presided over the opening ceremony. He underlined in his address the significance of assembling once again in Dakar. He also demonstrated his commitment to EFA by pointing to his country's major progress since 2000 and announcing new initiatives in primary education. Specifically, he asked his Minister of Education to provide a meal at school every day for all primary school pupils and to ensure that new school buildings include a refectory.

The opening ceremony also included messages from the Presidents of Benin, Ghana, Mali and Nigeria, as well as appeals from children representing Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The 7th meeting of the High-Level Group brought together 15 ministers or vice-ministers, though only two from donor countries. Unfortunately, and in spite of

strenuous efforts, the level of representation from donor governments did not match the importance of what is at stake.

We also welcomed the Vice-President for Human Development of the World Bank and the Deputy Executive Director of the World Food Programme, as well as the President of the Global Campaign for Education and the Managing Director of the World Economic Forum. Other agencies, countries and civil society organizations were represented by senior officials.

This was the first meeting of the High-Level Group to take place within the new sequence of EFA mechanisms. Thus, the agenda of the meeting was prepared by the EFA Working Group, which had met a month earlier in Paris. The topics addressed by the High-Level Group emerged directly from the Working Group's analysis of the new edition of the *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, namely: equity and inclusion, the quality of education, and the financing of EFA.

The Report, which was launched in New York at the end of November, was presented to participants and the press in Dakar. An overview of its main findings will also be provided this afternoon.

The discussion points prepared by the EFA Working Group were taken as a starting point for subsequent elaboration and development by the participants in the High-Level Group sessions. This new sequencing led to more focused discussions at the meeting, in two ways:

First, the fact that the topics were based on evidence from the *GMR* gave them a timeliness and importance for carrying the EFA agenda forward and enabled the moderators of each session to direct the discussion.

Second, participants worked in a focused way towards reaching consensus on the topics for the resulting communiqué.

In addition, the discussion on financing took place in two sub-groups, one addressing how to fund the neglected EFA goals, the other examining domestic and external resource needs. This enabled greater participation and more detailed debate on these key issues.

The communiqué process was also different this year, with the International Advisory Panel serving as the drafting committee. Since the Panel was also closely involved in preparing the meeting, the communiqué process had greater coherence and continuity. Being more concrete and specific in its recommendations, the draft communiqué stimulated vigorous debate in plenary, especially in regard to financing.

The communiqué focuses squarely on the three key messages which emerged from the 2008 *Global Monitoring Report*.

In terms of equity and inclusion, a detailed mapping of excluded groups and improved policy frameworks for inclusion were key actions identified for the coming year.

Regarding quality, once again the policy dimension was in focus, emphasizing three measures. First, countries must develop policies for training and recruiting greater numbers of primary school teachers. Second, they must take a comprehensive approach by focusing on curriculum, pedagogy, gender equality, language of instruction, textbooks and adequate facilities. Third, policies are required to ensure children are ready for learning, calling for higher participation in early childhood care and education, and access to health and nutrition programmes in school.

The question of financing EFA stimulated the most debate. Indicative targets were agreed for developing country budgets, but not for donor commitments, a sign of how difficult progress is on that front.

The communiqué also calls for raising the profile of EFA, particularly by linking it with other global development issues and events and by working for greater media exposure.

I believe that the communiqué sets out an important, though very challenging, collective agenda for 2008 and beyond.

Given the more specific discussions and outcomes of the meeting, the High-Level Group emphasized the need for systematic and accountable follow-up to the recommendations of the communiqué. For this purpose, the next meeting of the International Advisory Panel is scheduled to take place on 29 January 2008 in Oslo.

It will consider how the provisions of the communiqué should be acted upon, and later accounted for at the next High-Level Group meeting. This will be held from 16 to 18 December 2008, in Oslo, at the invitation of the Government of Norway.

The Secretariat is working with Norwegian representatives to ensure the early preparation of the meeting, with a common concern to maximize its impact. At its meeting next month, the International Advisory Panel will give preliminary consideration to the agenda for next December's event and the whole process leading up to it. This includes establishing effective links between the major EFA-related meetings in 2008, in particular the E-9 meeting in Bali in March and the International Conference on Education in Geneva in November. It also means working for the inclusion of EFA priorities on the agendas of other global and regional development meetings, such as TICAD IV, the G8 Summit and the international Financing for Development conferences. We need a systematic approach that maximizes the outcomes of all these events for the benefit of EFA.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you can see, the meeting of the High-Level Group in Dakar last week was productive, stimulating and engaging. The participants showed that there remains a high level of commitment to EFA and a clear determination to push forward towards the 2015 targets. It was gratifying to note the widespread appreciation of UNESCO's efforts to re-sequence the EFA mechanisms. There is room for improvement, of course, and we shall endeavour to apply the lessons learnt not only to the preparation of next year's events but also to the interface between EFA and the wider development agenda.

Thank you.