



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the opening ceremony
of the 2008 UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival of East Asia**

Gwangju, Republic of Korea, 24 July 2008

Mr Gwang Tae Park, Mayor of Gwangju Metropolitan City,
Mr Jang Sil Kim, vice-Minister of Culture, Sports and Tourism
of the Republic of Korea,
Mr Samuel Lee, Secretary-General of the Korean National Commission
for UNESCO,
Mr Gyu Chul Choi, Chairman of the Federation of Artistic and Cultural
Organizations in Gwangju,
Distinguished Guests,
Dear Children,

I am delighted to be with you here today in Gwangju to inaugurate the 2008 UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival of East Asia.

I wish to begin by extending a very special welcome to this year's talented young participants. They come from four countries and two regions – China, including Hong Kong SAR and Macau SAR, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea.

I also take great pleasure in welcoming the distinguished Japanese actress Komaki Kurihara, who has attended with me all of the Children's Performing Arts Festivals since they began in 2001.

A very special thanks goes to our Korean hosts for their generous and warm welcome – to the Government of the Republic of Korea, the Gwangju Metropolitan City, the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in Korea, including the UNESCO Gwangju-Jeonnal Association. This is the second time that the Republic of Korea hosts this event. I

recollect with great pleasure the Festival in Suwon in 2004, and am sure that we can look forward to another spectacular display of music and dance over the coming two days.

I would finally like to thank the National Commissions for UNESCO of China, Japan and Mongolia, as well as the UNESCO Centre of Macau and the National Federations of UNESCO Associations in China and Japan for their support and active cooperation in organizing this important event.

Distinguished guests, Dear children,

The aim of this festival is to enable children from East Asian countries to meet and perform together. It is hoped that by singing, dancing and interacting you will gain first-hand experience of other cultures – their similarities as well as their differences – with a view to developing mutual understanding and lasting bonds of international friendship.

Over the years, I have been delighted see how this annual Festival has grown, and become a place where the diverse cultures in this region come together in harmony. This wonderful fusion of traditions can yield fascinating results, as we have seen in the performances at past closing ceremonies. Here, young people from different countries in East Asia have joined their languages and traditional instruments to create innovative “remixes”. Through the spontaneous creativity of young and open minds, we have seen the great potential for music, and the arts in general, to serve as a catalyst for innovation and dialogue.

To the young performers who have gathered here today for this Festival, I would like to convey the following message.

The performing arts are very demanding. They require dedication, teamwork and tremendous preparation and practice. But they are also a means to more fully appreciate your own cultures and those of your neighbours.

You have come here to share and explore the tremendous richness of the cultural traditions of East Asia. You will spend time with other young people who may speak different languages, eat different food and wear different clothing, but who are ultimately just like you, and share your passion for the performing arts.

I hope that you will leave this Festival not only with many new friends, but also a new outlook on the world – an appreciation of diversity, but also a belief in the values that unite us. UNESCO counts on you, young leaders of the future, to be its ambassadors in promoting this vision of mutual respect and understanding. In our complex and often troubled world, it is now more important than ever that we celebrate dialogue and tolerance. These are the real foundations for lasting peace and harmony.

In this spirit, let me wish you all – participants, audience, and organizers – a most enjoyable festival.

Thank you.