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Organización
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para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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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 World Teachers' Day**

UNESCO, 3 October 2008

Ladies and Gentlemen, representatives of the teaching profession,
Ladies and Gentlemen, representing the agencies of the United Nations, partners of
World Teachers' Day,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On this day when we celebrate one of the finest professions in the world, I should like first of all to greet the teachers who have come from every region to share with us their beliefs and hopes as well as their concerns.

I bid welcome to the representatives of the sister agencies of the United Nations system who have joined us for this Day which has, unusually, been moved forward to 3 October for scheduling reasons.

I also greet the delegates of Education International, our partner, which represents 30 million teachers and education workers in the world, and the guest experts who will tell us about their rich experience in the field of teacher training and education for sustainable development.

Lastly, to all of you who have kindly responded to our invitation, welcome to UNESCO for this special day in honour of teachers, when I should like to invite you to join us in thinking about the difficulties and challenges facing the profession today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Considerable efforts have been made the world over, particularly in these past ten years, to increase the number of children in school. In several regions universal primary education is becoming a reality, with gross enrolment ratios nearing or having reached 100%. These results were highlighted as successes at the High-Level Event on implementing the Millennium Development Goals, held on 25 September 2008 at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Africa is still though at the heart of our concerns in spite of the efforts made by several countries to extend coverage of primary education.

While in 1990 almost half the children in Africa had access to primary education, in 2006 70% of them did. In Kenya, Uganda, the United Republic of Tanzania and other countries, the introduction of primary education free of charge has led to a sharp increase in the number of enrolments.

The growth in pupil numbers in primary education has had an immediate impact on secondary education, where the number of pupils rose from 21 to 26 million between 1998 and 2002. However, the gross enrolment ratio in secondary education in Africa was still 32% in 2006, as opposed to 53% for developing countries as a whole.

Access to higher education has followed the same trend: despite considerable progress, it remains in Africa the lowest in the world.

This relative improvement in quantitative terms must not blind us to the many problems that persist at all levels. I am referring here in particular to the high school drop-out rate, the unimpressive completion rates and poor learning outcomes.

Much remains to be done to improve the quality of education, particularly for children in the most vulnerable categories. These children must acquire the fundamental knowledge and skills needed to live in the twenty-first century. This is absolutely essential in order to increase productivity, strengthen social cohesion and reduce poverty.

One of the principal obstacles encountered by Member States on the path to developing their education systems is the lack of teachers.

At the global level, 18 million more teachers are needed to achieve universal primary education by 2015. For Africa, 3.6 million additional teachers will have to be recruited by 2015. Absenteeism and the shortage of administrative staff as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic are aggravating the situation. Experience has shown that the mass recruitment of contract staff is not always a solution, as it might establish a two-tier system.

In terms of quality, insufficient and sometimes inadequate training of teaching staff is preventing schools from developing genuine pupil-centred learning conducive to the development of intelligence, creativity and innovation.

In addition to this, the teaching profession is unattractive in many countries, without the worthwhile status which would enable teachers to flourish and grant them the social recognition to which they aspire.

In order to help resolve these problems, UNESCO has made the Teacher Training Initiative for Sub-Saharan Africa (TTISSA) one of the three main focuses of its action in the field of education. Since it was launched in 2006, the Initiative has provided considerable support for the development of teacher-training policies and policies to improve quality assurance and capacity-building.

Likewise, UNESCO is continuing its work in favour of the implementation in all Member States of the *1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers*, and the *Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel*, adopted by the Organization in 1997.

The situation of teaching staff is one of the major issues the High-Level Group on Education for All will be examining in Oslo, from 16 to 18 December 2008.

In all the activities carried out by UNESCO, in developing countries and in particular in Africa, the Organization places policies to develop the teaching profession at the heart of its priorities. This is how it means to play to the full its role of encouraging, accompanying and strengthening the capacities of teachers at all the stages of their career, from the recruitment and initial training of student teachers to their subsequent professional development.

I renew my appeal here to the education for all partners, and above all the industrialized countries, to pursue their efforts to fund and implement their pledges for education at the world level.

I also invite Member States and our EFA partners to make teachers a priority and to give them all the attention and support they deserve.

With competent and motivated teachers, schools will once again become the world over a place of excellence where the foundations of sustainable development and social progress are built.

On this World Teachers' Day, I wish to pay tribute to teachers and to assure them today, more than ever before, that they count!

Thank you for your attention.