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pour l'éducation,  
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Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
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Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
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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 the Round Table marking  
the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Auroville**

**UNESCO, 10 October 2008**

Mr Chairman of the Executive Board,  
Mr President of the General Conference,  
Dr Vatsayan, Member of the Executive Board,  
Mr Secretary for Education of the Government of India,  
Dr Patel, Member of the Auroville Foundation,  
Madam Ambassador,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you all to UNESCO Headquarters to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of Auroville.

Allow me first to express my sincere thanks to Ambassador Bhaswati Mukherjee and the Permanent Delegation of India to UNESCO for organizing today's round table and musical performance in celebration of Auroville. The light of the lantern we have just lit is an apt symbol of the strong cooperation between India and UNESCO – and indeed all UNESCO's Member States – in our work to build a more just and sustainable world. It also symbolizes the enduring spirit of hope that has driven Auroville since its establishment forty years ago.

Over the last four decades, UNESCO has enjoyed a special relationship with this unique international township in south India. During its foundation ceremony in February 1968, young people representing 124 UNESCO Member States deposited soil from their respective countries on the site of the future township to illustrate the fundamental concept of "unity in diversity". Since that historic day, UNESCO has regularly reiterated its support for Auroville, a place that embodies many of the

principles underlying the Organization's worldwide action to promote cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and lifelong learning as the basis for peaceful, sustainable societies.

Forty years ago, the founders of Auroville set a most noble objective: to create a place where people from different cultural, educational and political backgrounds can meet and work together towards their common goal of sustainable living. Thus, Auroville stands out as an unparalleled human experiment in transforming these ideals into reality. These same principles inform all aspects of life there, from its urban design to its economic structures and system of governance. Since its foundation, this constantly evolving community has launched innovative projects in areas as diverse as environment, health, education and social enterprise.

In so doing, Aurovillians have also worked closely with the inhabitants of the surrounding villages to help them improve their living conditions. The outlying rural region, considered by the local government as among India's most underdeveloped areas, has benefited greatly from Auroville's presence. Some 5,000 people from local communities have found employment in the township, and a number of health and educational facilities have been created to serve them.

Furthermore, following the havoc wreaked by the 2004 tsunami, Aurovillians sprang into action organizing emergency aid. Since then, the Auroville Tsunami Relief and Rehabilitation Project has been hard at work to ensure long-term rehabilitation and awareness raising through initiatives such as the "tsunamikas" dolls programme. Aurovillians are also exploring sustainable building practices and climate change to ensure better preparation for future natural disasters.

Indeed, Auroville's ability to survive and evolve over four decades bears witness to the strength of the founding principles and the resolve and perseverance of its citizens. In today's globalized world fraught with regional conflicts and economic instability, it is especially reassuring to witness such enduring models of solidarity and humanism.

During today's round table representatives from the Auroville Foundation will share insights on efforts underway in their community in the fields of culture, development, education, social sciences, environment, and building technologies. I hope that the lessons learned there will inspire similar experiments in sustainable

living in other parts of the world and look forward to continued collaboration between UNESCO and Aurovillians. May their light continue to shine brightly for many decades to come.

Thank you very much for your attention.