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de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
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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 Centenary celebration of King's College**

**Lagos, Nigeria, 7 January 2009**

Mr Chairman of today's occasion, the Sultan of Sokoto,  
Mr President of the King's College Old Boys Association, Distinguished King's  
College Old Boys,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Dear Students,

I am honoured to join you here today to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of King's College Lagos. I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the organizers, the College authorities and the State and Federal Governments of Nigeria for inviting me to be guest of honour on this landmark occasion.

Indeed, it is a pleasure to return to Nigeria, a country with which UNESCO now enjoys a very fruitful relationship.

My particular thanks go to the new Federal Minister of Education of Nigeria, Dr Sam Ominyi Egwu, who is a seasoned academician and a well remembered former Governor of Ebonyi State. I look forward to working closely with him in support of our shared goals.

Allow me to pay a special tribute to Professor Michael Omolewa, Nigeria's energetic Ambassador to UNESCO. My presence here today is due in large part to his foresight in talking to me over a year ago about this important event. I am grateful for his tireless work on behalf of his country and the continent of Africa.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This celebration marks a milestone in the history of education of Nigeria and of King's College in particular. Since its foundation in 1909, this school has set the benchmark for secondary education, not only in Nigeria, but also throughout Africa. Chief J. K. Randle, having attentively read your essay, entitled 'The Shooting of King's College Old Boys', I have learned that the school boasts among its alumni leaders and outstanding personalities from all walks of life.

I was particularly drawn to the story you recounted of King's College graduate Tunde Thompson, a journalist with 'The Guardian' newspaper who, in 1984, was arrested by the then military government on the charge of publishing a list of Nigeria's new envoys to various countries before its official publication. He was pressed, under pain of death, to reveal his sources. He refused to do so, however, and for his pains was sentenced to life imprisonment. He was, indeed, a brave journalist of whom King's College should be proud.

For a century, King's College has set the standard for excellence. Indeed, this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary is an achievement for all of Africa, since King's College has educated and inspired many students from neighbouring countries over the past century.

UNESCO is very proud to be associated with this commemoration as education is the Organization's highest priority.

First, because education is a fundamental human right, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This Declaration is rooted in the principle of non-discrimination on any basis. Everyone, no matter what one's background and circumstances, has a right to education, in particular, quality education. In 2004, the Federal Republic of Nigeria adopted the Compulsory, Free Universal Basic Education Act, which constitutes a landmark development in the field of education and Education for All (EFA). The Act is an outstanding example of national commitment to achieving basic Education for All as a fundamental human right.

Second, education is a development imperative. In today's increasingly knowledge-driven societies, education is a key to alleviating poverty, to improving health and nutrition, to raising incomes, to promoting sounder environmental practices and to strengthening peace and democracy. None of us could be here today without a good start, without strong educational foundations.

UNESCO believes in education. But not just any education – inclusive quality education throughout life and at all levels, from early childhood care and development to higher education and research.

This is a formidable ambition. But with political commitment, the right policies, and effective international support, it can be achieved.

This afternoon, I would like to examine some of the challenges that exist to realizing the right to education, in particular in Africa, and what UNESCO and its partners can and must do to address them.

I shall start with basic education. As lead coordinator of the Education for All (EFA) movement, promoting quality basic education is UNESCO's foremost concern, both for reasons of social justice and because this is where our investments can yield the greatest development impact.

In 2000, at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, over 160 countries committed themselves to achieve six goals by 2015. These goals aim to extend learning opportunities to every child, youth and adult. They target universal primary education and gender parity at all levels of education – two goals that were subsequently included among the Millennium Development Goals. However, the EFA goals go beyond the MDG agenda to address adult illiteracy, life skills programmes for youth and adults, care and education for very young children, and education quality. In particular, the EFA goals stress the need to reach the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in every society.

Each year, UNESCO convenes education leaders to assess progress and boost action towards this far-reaching agenda. The most recent EFA High-Level Group meeting, held last month in Oslo, where Nigeria was represented by the Minister of State for Education, Mrs Aishatu Jibril Dakku, showed reasons for both optimism and concern.

Optimism, because never before have there been so many children in school. Since Dakar, enrolments in primary education have increased at six times the rate of the previous decade. This is historic, unprecedented progress.

Africa has seen the fastest growth. Between 1999 and 2006 total primary enrolment rose by 42 percent – the highest increase in the world. This has happened because

of strong political commitment to education. Many African governments have taken ambitious measures to abolish school fees, to build classrooms and to hire more teachers. They have increased national spending on education. International aid to education has also supported this process.

There is a success story to tell. At the MDG Summit in New York last September, the massive expansion of primary schooling was hailed as one of the great achievements of the new millennium – a sign that global commitments can make a difference.

Nevertheless, despite such progress, serious concerns remain.

First, progress has been uneven between and within countries.

Globally, there are still 75 million children out of school. Of these, 47 percent are in Africa – some 35 million in total, almost one-third of the total primary-age population.

Behind these numbers are deep disparities in opportunity. The simple fact is that the children of the poor have much less chance of going to school than the children of the rich. These children are vulnerable. They live – and too often have to work – in remote areas, urban slums or conflict zones. They may be disabled or belong to an indigenous group or a linguistic minority. Many are orphans who have lost their parents to HIV and AIDS. They are also more likely to be girls.

In Africa, as globally, around 55 percent of children out of school are girls. Of these, 72 percent have never been enrolled – compared to 55 percent for boys.

Inequalities continue in the classroom. Discriminatory practices and materials, a lack of female teachers, and poor sanitation – among other factors – have a profoundly negative impact on educational opportunities and outcomes for girls.

And yet, as we heard in Oslo, policies exist that act on the causes of exclusion. They offer care and protection for the very young, because malnutrition remains one of the biggest barriers to achieving universal primary education. They provide financial support and incentives to the poorest households. They work with parents and communities to deliver literacy and skills programmes, because educated parents – in particular educated mothers – have a much higher chance of sending

their children to school, of seeking out health services when needed, and of escaping poverty and hunger.

The fact that 160 million adults in Africa – two-thirds of them women – cannot read and write represents a formidable brake on the region's development.

When millions of children, youth and adults are excluded from education, a whole country is set behind. That is why it is so important that the appeal issued in Oslo for stronger commitment to educational equity be acted upon urgently.

The Nigerian Government has made bold moves in this direction. Faced with the challenge of 8 million out-of-school children and more than 23 million illiterate adults, the Government has called for a major renewal of education systems and institutions. At the top of the agenda are measures to tackle disparities and target resources more equitably.

I intend to sign an agreement with the First Lady of Nigeria, Ms Hauyia Turai Yar'Adua, to boost cooperation between UNESCO and the Women and Youth Empowerment Foundation (WAYEF) in several key areas. We will give special emphasis to expanding girls' education and to enhancing the quality of learning outcomes.

This brings me to the second challenge: the need to improve quality. Millions of children drop out before completing primary school. Learning assessments document very low levels of basic literacy and numeracy. Too many children in Africa are studying in classrooms of over 100 students, without textbooks, learning materials or a trained and adequately paid teacher.

Quality is a multifaceted issue, but one thing is clear: EFA cannot be achieved without more and better qualified teachers.

UNESCO estimates that 18 million new teachers will be needed globally by 2015 to reach universal primary education – around 4 million in Africa alone.

All students and alumni here will agree what an enormous influence a good teacher can have on learning. However, in order to rapidly meet demand, many countries and communities are hiring contract or volunteer teachers who are unqualified to teach. The least trained teachers tend to serve the poorest – those who cannot

afford a good education. As the *2009 EFA Global Monitoring Report* shows, the poorest 20 percent in a country are those who have the least access to education and who score lowest on learning achievement tests. This represents a massive loss of potential, and a dangerous source of social and economic polarization.

To help countries raise quality and bridge the opportunity divide, EFA partners in Oslo announced the creation of a “Task Force on Teachers for EFA”. The new Task Force will coordinate and monitor activities to close the teacher gap within a specific time frame. In this, it will build on and reinforce initiatives already underway, including the UNESCO Teacher Training Initiative for sub-Saharan Africa – TTISSA.

Through TTISSA, UNESCO is supporting African countries, including Nigeria, in developing comprehensive teacher policies that cover recruitment, training, and career advancement.

UNESCO’s International Institute for Capacity-Building in Africa (IICBA), based in Addis Ababa, plays a strategic role in this initiative, in particular by helping African States mobilize communication technologies to scale-up and improve teacher training. I have recently appointed Mr Joseph Ngu, who did an excellent job as former head of IICBA, as the Director of UNESCO’s Office in Abuja.

The teacher issue draws attention to the third major concern, which is financing for education. Spending on teachers dominates education budgets. Yet, in many countries, these budgets are shrinking. In sub-Saharan Africa, about half of all low-income countries with data invest less than the recommended target of 4 to 6 percent of GNP in education.

Donors, too, are not meeting their promises. Despite pledges to increase support to Africa, aid to basic education on the continent stood at just 1.8 billion dollars in 2006 – far short of the estimated 7 billion dollars Africa needs each year right now.

In addition, this aid is still not being channelled to those countries most in need. Nor is it sufficiently long-term and predictable to support the recurrent costs of education, in particular teachers’ salaries.

There is enormous concern that the recent financial crisis and economic downturn will make this situation even worse, leading to cuts in social spending on the part of national governments and a decline in aid from donors.

We must be extremely vigilant and vocal not to let this happen. An economic recession is not the time to cut spending, but rather to step up investment in human capacity as vital for sustaining poverty reduction efforts and spurring economic growth. It is also a time when particular efforts are needed to protect and insulate the worlds' poorest who, while least responsible for the current crisis, are likely to be the hardest affected.

As leaders in Oslo warned, the financial meltdown must not be an excuse for governments and donors to renege on their commitments. Education is not a quick fix. It is a long-term investment. Any decrease in funding now will be difficult to make up for later on. If we want all children in primary school by 2015 we must act urgently.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Achieving education for all is and will remain UNESCO's top priority wherever it is lacking.

However, UNESCO has always viewed education as a continuum. It is not possible to make progress at one level without addressing the whole system.

Indeed, the rapid expansion of primary education in Africa is creating pressures at other levels of the education system, which, unless met, will put hard won EFA gains at risk.

Limited opportunities for progression to secondary and higher education, for instance, can have the effect of reducing demand for primary education.

Progress in basic education also depends on the expansion of post-primary learning opportunities for the training and supply of teachers. Teachers need to complete at least secondary education.

Furthermore, achieving EFA requires professional planners, policy-makers and statisticians who show leadership, creativity and innovation. This depends on robust institutions for higher education and research.

And, of course, post-primary education is important well beyond its significance to EFA.

In today's globalized knowledge-based world the level of education is increasingly a marker for success – both for individuals and nations as a whole.

As economies grow, and societies diversify, the more sophisticated are the skills needed for full socio-economic integration and civic participation.

New global challenges – from climate change to the food and energy crisis – make knowledge, in particular scientific knowledge, critical for sustainable development.

Secondary and tertiary institutions can no longer only serve an elite class. They have a social responsibility towards their own societies and people to ensure that every citizen has the knowledge and tools they need to thrive.

If Nigeria's vision of becoming one of the top 20 economies by 2020 is to come true, much more will have to be invested in strengthening the research and skills base and improving the performance of the education system at the higher levels.

As a result, governments across Africa are giving much greater attention to expanding secondary, vocational and higher education. This has been adopted as a priority under the African Union's Second Decade for Education in Africa. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) has also highlighted post-primary education and training as one of the greatest challenges facing education systems in Africa today. ADEA chose this as the theme of its 2008 Biennale, which I had the honour to address alongside President Guebuza in Maputo, Mozambique, last May.

Yet, the picture at the post-primary level remains deeply unequal.

Net enrolments in secondary education have risen steeply across Africa, from 18 percent in 1999 to 25 percent in 2006. Some countries have done away with

leaving exams at the end of primary school, which has been important in facilitating transition to the secondary level.

However, access still remains limited. Around 38 percent of primary school leavers in Africa still do not have access to lower secondary education. Some 78 million of the region's secondary school-age children are not enrolled in secondary school. Attendance rates are much lower among poorer households.

Enrolment in technical and vocational education is particularly low. Only about 6 percent of secondary school students in Africa are enrolled in this stream, compared to 10 percent worldwide. This is not a sound basis for building a more diversified higher-skilled economy.

And the problem is not just one of numbers. Quality, too, is a major concern. The curricula at secondary schools and technical institutions are outdated and increasingly inappropriate to development needs. There is also an acute shortage of trained teachers – in particular in mathematics and the sciences.

We must recognize that the alumni of King's College Lagos represent a privileged minority against the backdrop of deep inequalities in access and quality.

Opportunities further narrow when we reach the tertiary level. It is true that there has been a tremendous expansion, with enrolments doubling over the past six years. But despite this unprecedented growth, enrolment in higher education in Africa remains a mere 5 percent, the lowest of all regions.

Even in Nigeria, the country with the most expansive higher education system in Africa, enrolment stands at just 10 percent.

Gender gaps also persist. As at the secondary level, disparities favour girls as much as they do boys. Gender also strongly affects students' choice of study, with girls consistently under-represented in science, mathematics and engineering.

Quality, again, is an issue, with a real need to raise standards, in particular in the sciences. There is an acute shortage of qualified personnel, which is compounded by the migration of academics and researchers to developed countries. Africa faces the greatest loss of all regions in terms of brain drain.

As student enrolments have surged, the funds available to educate each student has decreased drastically with a negative impact on quality and relevance. In many places, private institutions have grown up to help meet burgeoning demand. However, the quality of these new providers is unequal, with a proliferation of bogus and sub-standard programmes.

The challenges at the post-primary level are many. However, UNESCO is working closely with partners to move forward on the two key fronts of access and quality. Let me highlight three initiatives that we are supporting.

First, UNESCO's Regional Bureau for Education in Africa, based in Dakar, is assisting African countries to expand the basic education cycle to incorporate junior secondary education. This means that children and youth will stand a better chance of completing the compulsory part of education with the knowledge and skills they need to participate fully in their societies and the work place. This initiative also aims to introduce competence-based curricula to increase the quality and relevance of education.

Second, UNESCO is embarking on a major review of its TVET programme so that it can better assist Member States in Africa, and elsewhere, to prepare their youth and adults for the world of work.

In this, we will be able to draw on the very effective joint project currently underway in Nigeria aimed at revitalizing the country's TVET system. Now in its second phase, this project has led to the updating of curricula, the large-scale publication of new, locally-produced technical textbooks and teaching materials, the setting up of thirteen Staff Development Centres across the country, and the training of more than 9,000 technical teachers. Work is also underway to develop a National Vocational Qualifications Framework that will link the formal and non-formal technical and vocational systems in the country. One of the major hallmarks of the programme – and a key factor behind its success – is the emphasis placed on harnessing local knowledge and expertise and making sure curricula are attuned to social and cultural realities and aspirations.

The third and final initiative I wish to highlight relates to higher education. UNESCO is currently in the process of preparing for the second World Conference on Higher Education, to be held in Paris this July. The aim is to help countries respond to the

challenges of a rapidly changing higher education landscape. We are giving particular attention to Africa.

In November, we held a preparatory meeting in Dakar to identify key issues facing the continent. One clear priority is to improve regional mobility and collaboration, mobilizing the potential of new communication technologies. Efforts are already underway in this direction, under the leadership of the African Union. UNESCO has also taken steps to support this process. We have developed guidelines for quality provision in cross-border higher education. We have established the Arusha Convention in Africa, as one of six regional conventions aimed at facilitating the mutual recognition of qualifications and assuring quality. Through the open resources community, we are also facilitating access to a wide range of courses that are now freely available in digital format.

These are all ways in which we are helping to promote a vibrant higher education space in the region and foster the human capacity Africa needs to address its development challenges and participate on a more equal footing in the global knowledge society.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we work together to bolster education systems in Africa, this school stands as an inspiration and a beacon of excellence.

As you enter the second centenary of King's College, it is my sincere hope that the school will continue to provide top quality education for Nigerian youth for years to come and instil in them a desire to serve their country and people.

UNESCO, for its part, will continue to work with the Government of Nigeria to ensure your further success in every field, and particularly to ensure that quality education becomes accessible to all.

Thank you again for inviting me to be a keynote speaker at this commemoration event. I wish you a very fruitful year of celebrations.

Thank you very much.