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la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
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 the conferment of the Honorary degree  
of Doctor of Letters  
of the National Open University of Nigeria**

**National Open University of Nigeria,  
7 January 2009**

Mr Vice President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,  
Mr President of the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,  
Former Presidents Shagari and Obasanjo,  
Professor Jegede, Vice Chancellor,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to receive this Honorary Doctorate of Letters at the maiden Convocation Ceremony of the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN) together with the President of the Senate and former Presidents Shagari. I accept it with great pleasure and see it as a recognition of UNESCO's support for Open and Distance Learning as a vital tool for the development of knowledge societies.

Allow me first to pay tribute to Vice Chancellor Jegede, with whom I signed an agreement in 2002 to establish a UNESCO Chair in Open and Distance Education at NOUN.

Under your direction, this Institution, with its 33,000 students, is playing a leading role in providing open and distance learning in a range of subjects from business and teacher training to science and technology within the West Africa sub region. In this, it is opening up quality educational opportunities to many who would otherwise be excluded, and contributing to Africa's development. Both of these are top priorities for UNESCO and I feel privileged to be formally associated with such a forward looking, innovative institution. This is a quality that well characterises the country.

Indeed, it is a pleasure to return to Nigeria for this my fourth official visit. Nigeria is a country with which UNESCO has for many years enjoyed a very fruitful relationship. In this regard, I wish to pay tribute to President Umaru Yar'Adua and to his predecessor, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo for the importance they have accorded to the actions of UNESCO during my mandate. I deeply regret that I was unable to go to Abuja last Monday to meet with President Yar'Adua, because my flight from Paris was cancelled due to the very bad weather conditions in Paris. I hope I will be able to see him in Abuja on Friday. However, I am very happy to have this opportunity to greet Chief Obasanjo and to express my warm congratulations to him on his graduation here today.

Thanks to him, I was able to visit the future Institute of African Culture and International Understanding to be located at the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library in Abeokuta, and I will sign the official Agreement with the Minister of Culture on the establishment of a UNESCO Category II Centre in February. I am confident that this newest addition to the family of UNESCO Category II Centres will make a significant contribution in the implementation of UNESCO's culture programme in Africa. My particular thanks go to the new Federal Minister of Education of Nigeria, Dr Sam Ominyin Egwu, who is a seasoned academician and a well remembered former Governor of Ebonyi State. I know we can look forward to a very fruitful partnership in support of our shared goals.

Today I am particularly happy to meet former President Shagahi. As a result of my stay in West Africa in the '60s, I developed a very strong attachment to Africa and its people. Being resident in Accra (Ghana), I covered ten West African countries but not including Nigeria since, given its importance, Japan opened a special embassy for the country. I was nevertheless able to come to Nigeria twice during the days of its first President Ajikiwe. I was therefore worried about political developments in Nigeria in the late '60s and '70s. I also remember the happy day when Mr. Shagahi, being democratically elected, became the President of Nigeria.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to focus my brief remarks on an issue that has rightfully received increasing recognition in recent years: the importance of promoting science and technology for sustainable development.

In fact, the general lack of integration of science and technology in national development planning processes is a major constraint to achieving sustainable development in many countries.

As the lead United Nations agency for science and technology, UNESCO works with its Member States to review, reformulate and implement science technology and innovation policies specific to national needs. This is achieved by building human and institutional capacities, through curriculum planners, teacher training and science education, as well as building capacity among policy makers.

UNESCO has made this the priority of its science programme in Africa and is cooperating closely with Nigeria in this regard. Indeed, I should like to pay tribute to the precursory role that the country has played in strengthening its science and technology capacities.

Nigeria was the first African country to receive UNESCO's support within its science policy programme in favour of Africa. Within the framework of the Nigeria- UNESCO Special Plan of Cooperation, which I established with the then President Obasanjo, we carried out a project on the reform of the Nigerian science, technology and innovation system which is funded jointly by Nigeria and the UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust for Capacity Building of Human Resources. This led to the establishment by the Government of Nigeria of a National Council for the Coordination of Scientific Research, as well as a National Science Foundation in October 2004. This work has been extremely well received by the international community.

The decision by the Government of Nigeria to host the first regional institution to promote science and technology, the Nelson Mandela Institute for Science and Technology, is further testimony to Nigeria's commitment to advancing cooperation in science and technology education.

Of course, Nigeria is not alone in Africa in recognizing the power of science and technology for development. Convinced that science, technology and innovation are critical to the sustainable future and economic growth of the continent, the Heads of State and Government of the African Union endorsed, in January 2007, at their 8<sup>th</sup> Summit in Addis Ababa, the Consolidated Plan of Action for Science and

Technology in Africa – or CPA. They also adopted the Addis Ababa Declaration on Scientific Research for Development.

The CPA - developed with UNESCO - emphasizes the need to build the continent's capacities to harness, apply and develop science and technology in order to eradicate poverty, fight diseases, stem environmental degradation, and improve economic competitiveness.

In responding to the AU's request to accompany its Member States in implementing the CPA for Science and Technology in Africa, we are focusing on enhancing countries' abilities to utilize scientific and technical knowledge and to promote innovation for development. Although not every country needs to be at the cutting edge of science, they do all need the domestic capacity to identify technology's potential benefits and to adapt new technology to its needs and constraints.

To date, UNESCO has received official requests from 18 African Member States requesting the Organization's assistance in reviewing their STI policy. This is a clear sign of the eagerness and determination of African leaders to formulate modern STI policies to drive sustainable development. The process is co-developed with the governments who take on the responsibility for ownership. This is a very important part of UNESCO's work in the sciences and has been recognized by our Member States as a priority area for the Organization.

Underpinning all of this is the need for well functioning and inclusive education systems that provide quality learning opportunities for everyone. That is why UNESCO is supporting African countries in their efforts to implement the Plan of Action for the Second Decade of Education in Africa, and why it encourages institutions such as the National Open University of Nigeria in their efforts to bolster the capacity for scientific research. I cannot emphasize strongly enough that success here is crucial to all development efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I would like once again to thank the Open University of Nigeria for bestowing this prestigious title upon me. I am pleased to accept it personally and on behalf of UNESCO's work in science and technology and education. You may be

assured of my own, and UNESCO's, continued support to African Member States as they continue to further develop and implement their STI policies.

Thank you very much for your attention.