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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 Information Meeting
with Permanent Delegates on Gaza**

UNESCO, 6 February 2009

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you all to this Information Meeting. Let me first apologize for the short notice. However, I wanted to hold this meeting as quickly as possible given the important number of recent requests made by Member States for more details on UNESCO's response to the crisis in Gaza.

I am now in a position to provide a full update on UNESCO's early response, and to inform Member States about the needs on the ground and how and where we can provide support.

As you will know, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, John Holmes, formally launched the Gaza Flash Appeal in Geneva on February 2nd.

This Flash Appeal for 613 million US dollars is based on the outcome of needs assessments conducted in Gaza. It is a strategic plan incorporating 106 NGO and 82 UN projects to respond to the emergency humanitarian and early recovery needs of some 1.4 million people in the Gaza Strip. These projects cover 13 key areas of assistance, including education and protection, for a 9 month period, incorporating emergency needs and elements of early recovery.

There are six UNESCO projects within the Appeal. As outlined in the information note distributed to you, these amount to a total value of approximately 3 million US dollars.

Of the six projects, five address urgent educational needs. With children and young people under the age of 18 comprising 56% of the population in Gaza, UNESCO has a critical role to play in addressing the human impact of the crisis and in bringing back a sense of normality and hope.

The five projects aim to help restore quality educational services at all levels, in particular in secondary and higher education, which are too often neglected in the humanitarian response.

The sixth project focuses on strengthening the safety and protection of journalists and enhancing press freedom in the Gaza Strip. My colleagues will provide more details on these projects and the needs to which they respond.

In the present context of a humanitarian emergency, UNESCO's priority concern is to assess, plan and deliver as "one" in close cooperation with other UN agencies, funds and programmes, as well as with other non governmental humanitarian actors on the ground.

But clearly, there are major needs for long-term reconstruction that must be addressed as well. The UN is therefore continuing the detailed assessment of damages.

It is within the framework of this overall UN-led assessment effort that UNESCO sent a rapid assessment mission to Gaza on February 1st and 2nd.

Taking part in this mission was: Mrs Louise Haxthausen, the Head of our Office for the Palestinian Territories, located in Ramallah; Mr Giovanni Fontana, a culture programme specialist; and Ms Eli Rognerud, an education programme specialist.

The purpose of the mission was to contribute to overall UN efforts and provide data related to the state of the education system and the cultural heritage sites in Gaza. The mission visited major cultural and natural heritage sites and met with relevant UN and humanitarian actors in the field of education. UNESCO is also providing information on the situation of media professionals and infrastructure.

Based on this assessment mission, UNESCO will refine its projects included in the Flash Appeal and immediately start assisting the Palestinian Authority in drafting the Gaza Early Recovery and Reconstruction Plan, in parallel with the humanitarian assistance phase. This Plan, focused on needs and priorities for long-term reconstruction over a two-year period, is to be launched during an international donor conference in Cairo, Egypt, on March 2nd, which I asked Deputy-Director-General Marcio Barbosa to attend.

Before giving the floor to the head of our Office in Ramallah, however, I would like to reiterate a few points.

During the fighting, I publicly expressed in several statements my deep concern at the devastating impact of the crisis on the civilian population. I reiterated the UN Secretary-General's appeal for a cessation of all violence in Gaza and southern Israel and his calls for the protection of educational and cultural institutions.

I also raised concern at the disruption of basic services – including educational services for the children and youth of Gaza. Indeed, in a joint statement issued on 7 January with the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, I strongly underscored that schools should in no way be involved in military conflict and must remain zones of peace and security in all circumstances.

In this regard, I welcomed and supported the call by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser al Missned, First Lady of Qatar and UNESCO Special Envoy for Basic and Higher Education, to ensure the more effective protection of schools in times of armed conflicts, now and in future. I have since contacted the Commissioner General of UNRWA to see how this could be operationalized on the ground. As a sign of our commitment, a project on the promotion of schools as safe zones was proposed – and subsequently included – in the Gaza Flash Appeal.

As we know, however, infrastructure for the delivery of educational services has been severely damaged in Gaza. The protection of schoolchildren, of teachers, and of education and media professionals was repeatedly compromised during the conflict, and remains vulnerable. We have also received reports from the Palestinian Authority about damage to major cultural heritage sites in the territory.

Now that two unilateral ceasefires are in place, I shall ensure that UNESCO does everything it can within its fields of competence to bring relief to the population of Gaza.

Let me stress again, as I did in my statement on the Gaza Flash Appeal, that I very much hope Member States and donors will respond positively to this urgent demand for financial support so that we can help the people of Gaza at this time of great distress. Despite the political and operational constraints, this support will be crucial so that we can respond, in our fields of competence, to emergency and early recovery needs.

Finally, I would like to inform you that I have decided to scale up UNESCO's response capacity in Gaza so that our assistance can be efficiently delivered, despite the challenging constraints that we are facing on the ground. In this regard, I should like to express my gratitude to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) for having agreed to the rapid deployment of an education specialist to the UNESCO Office in Ramallah.

I have also decided to establish a project antenna within the UNDP compound in Gaza City for the duration of the implementation of our projects.

With this reinforced presence, UNESCO will continue to act where it has specific expertise and added-value to bring to the affected communities, drawing on the experience and lessons learned from our response to other crisis situations.

Here, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the staff of our Office for the Palestinian Territories for their hard work and dedication during this very difficult period.

Let me close with a heartfelt wish that the year ahead will see real progress towards rehabilitation, development and dialogue in the region.

Together with my colleagues, I look forward to your questions and now give the floor to the Head of the UNESCO Office for the Palestinian Territories.

Thank you very much for your attention.