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Organización
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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 award ceremony for the
L'Oréal-UNESCO Prize for Women in Science**

UNESCO, 5 March 2009

· Mr Chief Executive Officer of L'Oréal,
· Mr President and Founder of the Prize,
Mr President of the Jury,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you once more to UNESCO Headquarters on the occasion of the award of the 2009 L'Oréal-UNESCO Prize for Women in Science.

As we prepare to celebrate International Women's Day in a few days' time, I can but welcome this new tribute to five outstanding scientists, bringing to 57 the number of women who have been awarded the Prize.

Moreover, I should like to stress the particular importance of awarding these Prizes now that we face an unprecedented global economic and financial crisis. In the face of this crisis, we must, more than ever before, invest in education and training, promote innovative science policies and build countries' capacities. It is also to reinforce this message that we have gathered here today.

Allow me, in this context, to welcome most warmly Sir Lindsay Owen-Jones, who is here today. Thanks to you and with you, we have achieved a unique form of cooperation in the last 10 years. For my part, ever since I became executive head of UNESCO in 1999, I have fully supported the smooth conduct of this partnership, which is one of the Organization's most successful joint ventures. I therefore wish to thank you personally for your support and the trust you have shown us during those years.

I also wish to welcome the new President of the Jury, Professor Ahmed Zewail, winner of the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. Under your influence, the Prize has opened up to disciplines that have not been studied a great deal to date. We are grateful to you on that account and hope that you will continue to have the Prize associated with the quest for quality, innovation and, above all, excellence.

Lastly, I welcome the Founding President of the Prize, Professor Christian de Duve, winner of the Nobel Prize in Medicine, through whom this prize for women in science has won universal prestige and acclaim.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This evening we shall pay tribute to five outstanding women who are being rewarded for the excellence and originality of their work in the physical sciences. They are Akiko Kobayashi (Japan), winner for Asia and the Pacific, Eugenia Kumacheva (Canada), winner for North America, Athene M. Donald (United Kingdom), winner for Europe, Beatriz Barbuy (Brazil), winner for Latin America, and Tebello Nyokong (South Africa), winner for Africa and the Arab States.

This evening we shall honour five remarkable scientific careers – five career paths rooted in the realities of five continents, thus illustrating the diversity of research policies and support for research worldwide.

Furthermore, these enriching careers mark a welcome diversification of the scientific disciplines. This year, chemistry thus takes its rightful place.

Lastly, this evening we shall above all honour five women, as the L'Oréal-UNESCO Prize does much more than merely reward scientific excellence. It also, for women, conveys a message of liberty, equality and equity.

For thousands of girls who have a passion for science but often encounter powerful obstacles, it is an encouragement to throw off the dead weight of social, economic and cultural determinism.

We must foster such diversity and diversification in women's lives and careers. We must also make science more accessible and more inclusive. Lastly, we must ensure that in future women can hold senior positions in the bodies responsible for formulating and implementing new science policies.

The five women who are here this evening embody that shared aspiration. Allow me, then, to pay them once more a heartfelt tribute.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I now turn to the 15 young winners of the UNESCO-L'Oréal international fellowships, to whom I express my sincerest congratulations.

As you know, these fellowships are intended to assist young women in pursuing postdoctoral research in their countries of origin. These young scientists can thus ensure that their countries benefit from the experience they have often gained in other laboratories abroad.

At the beginning of the project 10 years ago there were 10 winners, and now there are 135, representing 71 countries worldwide.

As counter-examples to the all too common "brain drain", they embody today the face of shared-knowledge societies rooted in genuine ethics of exchange and cooperation. They also confirm the formidable human potential that exists in many, often ignored, countries that we must encourage and promote.

Moreover, they are the face of science tomorrow. Like the L'Oréal national fellowships, awarded with the support of National Commissions for UNESCO, which have to date supported more than 500 postdoctoral students in 39 countries, these 15 international fellowships are also good cause for stating that youth, gender equality and the promotion of science can indeed be combined more effectively today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Never has the message conveyed by the L'Oréal-UNESCO Prize seemed so relevant to me.

Investment in research and innovation, equal opportunities, gender parity, circulating and sharing knowledge, building pluralist and inclusive societies: this message must continue to be transmitted convincingly.

These objectives have become emblematic of the partnership between UNESCO and L'Oréal in the last decade.

We still bear in mind the Charter for Women and Science, adopted in 2008 by the prizewinners, which was an undertaking on two essential points, the transmission of passion for research and the promotion of science as a source of progress.

By continuing to invest in quality education for all and by increasing equal opportunities for women, we shall rise to the challenge. It is a political choice that will crucially affect, in particular, the future of emerging and developing countries and that we must make with assurance.

Accordingly, I should like to say to Sir Lindsay Owen-Jones, to the President of the International Jury and to the winners of the Prize and fellowships that UNESCO will remain at your sides in order to translate into reality our vision of knowledge societies as the source of human, sustainable development for all, including women.

Thank you for your attention.