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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
round table “Human Rights and Memory”**

UNESCO, 14 April 2009

Senator Daniel Filmus,
Ambassador Miguel Angel Estrella,
Ms Estela de Carlotto,
Distinguished panellists,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a true pleasure to welcome you on the occasion of this round table on “Human Rights and Memory”, organized by the Permanent Delegation of Argentina to UNESCO to celebrate the establishment in Buenos Aires of the International Centre for the Advancement of Human Rights.

Two months ago, during my third official visit to Argentina, I had the honour of signing with the Minister for Foreign Relations, International Trade and Worship, in the presence of Her Excellency President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, the agreement establishing the international centre as a category 2 centre under the auspices of UNESCO.

This great success is mainly due to the efforts and the commitment of Senator Daniel Filmus and Ambassador Miguel Angel Estrella. I should like to thank them once again for their support, and congratulate them for having taken the initiative for this special celebration.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

There is indeed much to celebrate. This is the first category 2 international centre established under the auspices of UNESCO in the field of human rights. Its creation marked the culmination and conclusion of UNESCO's year-long engagement in the United Nations-wide commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Symbolically, this International Centre will be hosted on the premises of the former Naval School of Mechanical Engineering, which served as a secret detention centre during the dictatorship. It is believed that more than 5,000 persons were detained, tortured and perished on these premises. However, since 2004, the location has been turned into a Museum of Memory and Human Rights. I find it important – and deeply moving – that what was once a place of detention, torture and death, is now a space dedicated to promoting education through memory and ensuring that the atrocities of the past shall never be repeated.

It is therefore particularly fitting that this space will not only host the future International Centre for the Advancement of Human Rights, but also become the repository of the Human Rights Documentary Heritage of Argentina. This documentary heritage, which in 2007 was inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register, brings to light the massive and systematic human rights violations committed by the military dictatorship from 1976 to 1983. It holds unique evidence for the reconstruction of individual and collective memory in the search of truth and identity.

In this regard, I would like to quote what President Cristina Fernández de Kirchner said at the signing ceremony. She declared that the right to memory was not only an individual but also a collective right, and that the creation of this International Centre under the auspices of UNESCO was “the recognition of the struggle led by thousands of Argentine citizens to restore truth, memory and justice”. This, she claimed, is the “victorious song of the victims of the dictatorship”.

President Kirchner also chose this occasion to announce that the identity of a girl born in detention had been uncovered that same day, thanks to the tireless efforts of the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo, whose President, Mrs Estela de Carlotto, we are honoured to welcome today to UNESCO.

Through you, Señora de Carlotto, I would like to express my sincere admiration and deep respect to the members of the Argentine community who fought daily for the recognition of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Thanks to their devotion and dedication, we can hope that such abhorrent crimes never happen again.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In conclusion, I would like to commend the Government of Argentina for its firm commitment to human rights education and for taking effective measures to ensure the smooth functioning of the new International Centre, which will launch its work in May 2010.

We expect this Centre to provide specialized human rights training, to conduct research and offer decision-makers with valuable advice on the formulation of relevant human rights policies.

UNESCO will cooperate closely with the Centre in the achievement of these endeavours. I am confident that in pursuing the aims of the 60th anniversary campaign, "Dignity and Justice for All of Us", it will contribute greatly to the consolidation of a culture of human rights in Latin America and the Caribbean, and worldwide.

I wish you much success in your discussions and thank you for your attention.