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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 inauguration ceremony
of the Aksum Obelisk exhibition**

UNESCO, 23 April 2009

Ms Ambassador of Ethiopia,
Mr Ambassador of Italy,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both an honour and a pleasure to welcome you today to UNESCO for the inauguration of this stunning exhibition celebrating the re-installation of the Aksum Obelisk in Ethiopia in July 2008.

The exhibition has been specially designed to evoke both the scale and complexity of the project. The long central structure, whose large-scale photographs and films document key moments of the re-installation, is a horizontal re-creation of the exact volume of the 23.4-metre-high stele.

The exhibition also conveys a sense of the spontaneous, joyous festivities that have marked all the phases of the operations in Ethiopia: from the arrival by plane of the three sections of the obelisk in 2005, to the inauguration ceremony in Aksum on 4 September 2008. Indeed, this ceremony was a fitting end to the year-long celebrations of the Third Ethiopian Millennium, whose dawn we had marked here in UNESCO in December 2007.

Today we are delighted to celebrate another milestone: the successful completion of this remarkable adventure. The specially designed metal support structure that obscured the obelisk over the past year has been dismantled at last. Thanks to the hard work, dedication and talents of UNESCO staff and experts, the 152-ton obelisk now proudly stands unencumbered on the Aksum World Heritage site as

an archaeological reminder of Ethiopia's glorious past and a testimony to human creativity.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As this exhibition vividly illustrates, this long and complex operation constitutes an extraordinary and unprecedented technical achievement. But the project also has a tremendous symbolic significance.

Indeed, it is my hope that the Aksum project will be remembered above all as a convincing demonstration of the power of dialogue, international cooperation, and culture in development strategies.

As we are all aware, the project could not have reached its final stage without close cooperation between the governments of Ethiopia and Italy. In this regard, I would like to reiterate UNESCO's deep gratitude to the Italian Government for its unwavering political commitment to and generous funding of this project. I also wish to pay tribute to the dedication of the Government and people of Ethiopia and to congratulate them for their invaluable contribution to the project's success.

For all Ethiopians, the Aksum Obelisk is much more than an archaeological vestige of a bygone era: it stands as a potent and vibrant symbol of their national heritage and pride. To fully appreciate the potential impact of cultural heritage on reinforcing identity and social cohesion, we need only recall the joyous reactions of the Ethiopians to the return and reinstallation of the Aksum obelisk that I referred to moments ago.

At the present time, when international leaders and decision makers are searching for sustainable solutions to the crises that are wreaking havoc around the world, and whose consequences may be particularly dire for the peoples of the South, success stories such as the Aksum project provide convincing arguments for integrating culture into development strategies with a view to ensuring a brighter future for all peoples of the planet.

I hope you will enjoy the exhibition and thank you very much for your attention.