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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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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 of the photo-exhibition on
Afro-Uruguayan cultural traditions and history within the
context of the Coalition of Latin American and Caribbean Cities
against Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia**

UNESCO, 24 April 2009

Ms María Simón, Minister of Education and Culture of Uruguay,
Ambassador Jorge Lepra, Permanent Delegate of Uruguay,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to welcome you to UNESCO in order to inaugurate this photography exhibition which illustrates Uruguay's great cultural wealth and highlights the valuable contributions of its history, culture and traditions.

I should first like to thank the Uruguayan Government for having availed itself of this opportunity to reaffirm its support for the initiatives to combat racism, discrimination and xenophobia given impetus by UNESCO, and express my great satisfaction at its commitment to the Coalition of Latin American and Caribbean Cities against Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia led by Montevideo.

Finally, allow me to pay tribute to the artists of this exhibition – the photographer Ignacio Naón, who with the many different facets of his talent celebrates the culture and traditions of his country, as you will be able to appreciate in a moment.

Ladies and gentlemen,

UNESCO's International Coalition of Cities was conceived after the 2001 World Conference against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, which took place in Durban, South Africa. It helps municipalities develop and strengthen their policies for greater social cohesion in urban areas and contributes to the fight against racism and discrimination by advancing scientific

research and reflection, revitalizing standard setting instruments, reinforcing education and awareness-raising activities, and mobilizing opinion leaders, decision-makers and diverse other actors. Therefore, its activities fit well with those spearheaded by Edgardo Ortuno, afro-descendant member of Uruguay's Congress who, with the support of President Tabaré Vázquez, has done much to denounce discrimination in Uruguay and encourage more positive discrimination towards the country's minorities, especially its afro-descendants. This includes a more overt recognition of their contributions to all levels of Uruguayan life, traditions and culture.

The Uruguayan Government's commitment to diversity and equality is reflected in its adoption of a special programme for Afro-Latin education that encourages discussion on issues as varied as slavery, Afro-Latin music and human rights. It also has plans to launch a network of national authorities to combat racism, discrimination and xenophobia. These are encouraging steps.

The Latin America and the Caribbean chapter of the Coalition plays an important role in these endeavours. Launched in 2006 under the auspices of the City of Montevideo, it now comprises more than 200 municipalities and has its own internal statutes, steering and technical committees and projects aimed at fighting racism and discrimination. By associating the Coalition to this exhibition, I believe the Uruguayan Government is showing recognition for the contribution of this important activity to bringing the struggle against all forms of discrimination in Uruguay to the forefront.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Whether at the municipal, national or international level, initiatives such as this exhibition not only help us learn more about a country's history, but also about its needs, aspirations and peoples. They make an invaluable contribution to the creation of a comprehensive national cultural identity that incorporates all groups, creating a consciousness that an entire nation can claim as its own, regardless of ethnic origin. In my view, this is one of the best examples of how the struggle against racism and discrimination can be won.

Uruguay counts some 200,000 Afro-Uruguayans, the majority of whom live in Montevideo. Their music, dance, art and writing have played an important role in the evolution of the national culture. African folklore is particularly prominent during the Carnival celebrations that take place in Montevideo every February, and

popular speech in the country incorporates many words of African origin. Indeed, Yémonjà, the Goddess of the Seas and the centre of the Carnival celebrations, is herself of the Yoruba tradition that originated on the west coast of Africa. Today, she is celebrated at many points along the slave routes, most especially in Nigeria, the Benin Republic, Brazil and Cuba. Furthermore, the popular Candombe music that you will hear later and which has been presented by Uruguay as a candidate for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity originated among the Afro-Uruguayans and is based on Bantu African drumming combined with some European influences and touches of tango. Its value as a national cultural treasure is already enshrined in celebrations that take place every 3 December, which has been declared by the Uruguayan Government as the National Day of Candombe, Afro-Uruguayan Culture and Racial Equality.

I hope you will enjoy the visual delights offered in this exhibition and that you will learn much about the convergence of Uruguay's different cultures – from the time of the conquistadors to today. During the demonstration of the Candombe that you will witness shortly, I encourage you to tap your feet and sway along to the bewitching "Llamada de Tambores" or "call of the drums". Perhaps in so doing, we can create some of the atmosphere that is rumoured to exist on the streets of Montevideo, when the various *cuerdas* (or drum ensembles) come together to play under the moon-lit skies, luring every passer-by to their enchanting rhythms.

Thank you.