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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

Señora María Simón, Ministra de Educación y Cultura del Uruguay,

Embajador Jorge Lepra, Delegado Permanente del Uruguay

Excelencias,

Señoras y Señores,

Es para mi un grato placer recibirlos en la UNESCO para inaugurar esta muestra fotográfica que ilustra la gran riqueza cultural del Uruguay y pone en relieve valiosos aportes de su historia, su cultura y sus tradiciones.

Quiero ante todo agradecerle al Gobierno uruguayo el haber aprovechado esta oportunidad para reafirmar su apoyo a las iniciativas de lucha contra el racismo, la discriminación y la xenofobia impulsadas por la UNESCO, y expresar mi gran satisfacción por su compromiso con la Coalición Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Ciudades contra el racismo liderada por Montevideo.

Por último, permítaseme rendir un homenaje al artista de esta muestra – el fotógrafo Ignacio Naón, que con las múltiples facetas de su talento celebra la cultura y las tradiciones de su país, como podrán admirarlo en un momento.

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 *cuerda* (or drum ensembles) come together to play under the moon-lit skies, luring every passer-by to their enchanting rhythms.

Thank you