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联合国教育、
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**Address by Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the opening of the sixth session of the
Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC)**

UNESCO, 9 July 2009

Mr Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am extremely pleased to open this sixth session of the Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee (IGBC), and to welcome the representatives of the 36 States members of this Committee.

I convey warm greetings to the outgoing Chairperson of IGBC, Mr Jude Mathooko, and thank him for the work he has accomplished in that capacity.

I also welcome the representatives of other States who will be attending the session as observers, and also all observers designated by international organizations or attending in their own capacity.

Finally, allow me to salute the presence of Mr Adolfo Martínez Palomo, Chairperson of the International Bioethics Committee (IBC), and of Mr Toivo Maimets, Vice-Chairperson of IBC. Both have graciously accepted my invitation to participate in this session of IGBC in order to assist you in your reflections by providing useful and relevant explanations of the work of IBC.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you no doubt know, quite recently, on 11 June, I held an information meeting for the Permanent Delegations on the bioethics programme, with a view to taking stock of UNESCO's action in the field of bioethics over the past 10 years, and to outlining

prospects for future action. That is why I have asked for the text of this statement to be distributed in the meeting room and placed at your disposal.

I wished to mention this at the outset, because as this decade draws to a close, I note with satisfaction that UNESCO, thanks to the precious assistance of IGBC, has met the expectations of the international community.

In addition to the three universal declarations of 1997, 2003 and 2005, which constituted major breakthroughs in the history of bioethics by recognizing universally accepted norms on issues as complex as the genome, genetic data and the principles of bioethics, we have been able to put in place excellent programmes covering analysis, teaching, research and capacity-building.

In this process, which has helped in no small measure to enhance the impact and visibility of the Organization, IGBC has played a key role.

Complementing the work of IBC, IGBC has provided a pluralist viewpoint and an indispensable political perspective, which has enabled States to make their needs and expectations known, and afforded me constantly relevant advice.

Indeed, given the growing internationalization of scientific and medical research, and the globalization of ethical questions, the need for a better understanding of the ethical challenges is being increasingly sharply felt.

Thanks to IGBC, I know that UNESCO is now able to continue to provide such a platform for reflection and debate, using an approach which is at one and the same time multidisciplinary, multicultural and pluralist.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two fundamental questions are inscribed on the programme of work of IBC and IGBC for 2009-2009, namely that of social responsibility and health, and that of human cloning and international governance.

The joint session of IBC and IGBC that I convened in October 2008 provided an opportunity for a constructive exchange on both those questions, and paved the way for constant interaction between the two committees.

On the question of social responsibility and health, the postponement of the previous session of IBC, because of the influenza A (H1N1) epidemic, has provided IGBC with a fresh opportunity to debate and help to finalize the document drawn up by IBC, which is to be approved at its forthcoming session in November 2009.

You will note that the new version of the draft report submitted to you, dated 29 March 2009, has been substantially revised by IBC in order to take into account the comments made at the October 2008 meeting. Your contribution today may well prove to be essential for the further enhancement of this document.

I now come to the question of cloning and governance at the international level. As you know, it is at my request that IBC has again considered this issue, following the publication in 2007 of a United Nations University (UNU) report on the matter.

In 1997, the Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights, which was adopted unanimously, introduced the principle that “practices which are contrary to human dignity, such as reproductive cloning of human beings” should not be permitted (Article 11). However, rapid changes in scientific practice with regard to cloning and the use of stem cells, in particular pluripotent stem cells, have led us to reconsider this question.

Following a year of intensive work, enriched by public hearings and an exchange with your Committee, IBC was able to finalize its report on the question of human cloning and international governance and submit it to me on 9 June.

In their conclusions, the members of IBC indicate that “although it may be premature for the international community to engage now in the elaboration of a new binding normative instrument aiming at harmonizing both practices and principles in this area, the issues surrounding the international governance of human cloning cannot be ignored and a focused international dialogue is crucially needed”.

At the information meeting I referred to at the beginning of my statement, I stressed that UNESCO should always remain ready to respond to emerging ethical challenges, and seek ways and means of resolving ethical dilemmas through international cooperation, in a spirit of consensus.

On the question of cloning, it is thus important for UNESCO and the international community to continue to be involved in this debate, including, if deemed necessary, through standard-setting activity.

I thus now await with great interest your conclusions following your exchanges on this most important question.

In any case, the forthcoming session of IBC, now to be held in late November, after the 35th session of the General Conference, may provide an initial opportunity to discuss what action might be taken on this report.

It remains for me to wish you a most fruitful session, and to say once again what great importance I attach to your debates.

I shall follow your discussions attentively, and I shall not fail to transmit your recommendations, together with those of IBC, to the General Conference at its forthcoming session in October.

Thank you for your attention.