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Organización
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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 opening ceremony
of the 2009 UNESCO Children's Performing
Arts Festival of East Asia**

Nara Prefecture, Japan, 6 August 2009

Dear participating members of the Organizing Committee for the Children's
Performing Arts Festival in Nara,

Distinguished Guests,

Dear Children,

I am delighted to join you for the 2009 UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival
of East Asia.

I am very happy that this year's festival is taking place in Nara, the ancient capital of
my own country, Japan. It is a place where the performing arts and cultural
expressions have long played an important role. In fact, next year the people of
Nara and the entire nation will celebrate the 1,300th anniversary of the founding of
Nara as the cradle of Japanese civilization and culture, in the year 710.

Indeed, Nara's position at the end of the Silk Road connecting China, Korea, Japan,
Central Asia and Europe, meant that it was influenced by the cultural expressions
transported along the route. Many of them are still vividly present today. I hope that
all of you will have the opportunity to learn more about them during your time here.

Let me begin by extending a special welcome to the talented young performers who
have joined us from China, including Hong Kong SAR and Macau SAR, Mongolia,
the Republic of Korea and, of course, Japan to take part in this festival. I am sorry
that children from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, who have been
regular participants in the Festival since it began in 2001, have not been able to join
us this year.

I take great pleasure in once again welcoming the distinguished Japanese actress, Ms Komaki Kurihara, who has attended with me each edition of the UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival.

Ms Kurihara, your constant support for the Festival has been very precious and has helped to make it all the more special. I wish to present you with the UNESCO Yakushiji medal as a symbol of my - and UNESCO's - appreciation of your contribution.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the Organizing Committee for the 2009 UNESCO Children's Performing Arts Festival of East Asia, the Japanese National Commission for UNESCO and the Nara Prefecture for their generous hospitality and hard work in ensuring its success.

Special thanks also to the National Commissions for UNESCO of Mongolia, China and the Republic of Korea, as well as the UNESCO Centre of Macau, the National Federation of UNESCO Associations in China and the National Federation of UNESCO Associations of Japan for their support and active cooperation in the organization of this international event.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Children,

As a UNESCO flagship project of the United Nations International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), the festival has, since its creation in 2001, proven to be a richly rewarding experience for everyone involved.

Through my personal involvement with each of the festivals, I have been privileged to see at first hand their immense impact. The harnessing of children's creative energies, as well the opportunity to travel and meet other children from different countries and cultures offer tremendous potential for learning about and appreciating other countries. With their cooperation, friendly rivalry, and shared pleasure in one another's accomplishments, the children have much to teach the world of adults.

To the young performers who have gathered here today, I would like to convey an important message. The performing arts are very demanding: they require dedication, teamwork and a great deal of preparation and practice. But they are also one of the best ways for people to meet and get to know one another, enabling them to overcome differences by working towards a common objective. In these turbulent times of economic and social crisis, such mutual understanding and solidarity are invaluable tools for building a brighter tomorrow.

The countries you come from share many historic and cultural links. But there also exists a rich diversity of cultural traditions and practices, which is precisely what you are here in Nara to share and explore. You will overcome the language and cultural boundaries to make new friends, with whom you share a common passion for performing arts. Dances and songs will become the vehicle of communication on stage.

I hope that your encounters with the other children in this festival will be the beginning of lifelong friendships. I also hope they will give you a new outlook on the world and the confidence to play a role in promoting UNESCO's values of peace, mutual understanding and friendship in your countries and across the region.

Let me once again express my sincere appreciation to those who have worked hard together to prepare for this festival and wish everyone involved a most enjoyable time.

Thank you.