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**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the Information meeting
with Permanent Delegations
on WSIS follow-up and implementation**

UNESCO, 1 September 2009

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to have this opportunity to discuss with you UNESCO's contribution to the follow up and implementation of the World Summit on the Information Society - or WSIS.

This is the latest in a series of meetings convened to provide you with a comprehensive briefing on the status of UNESCO's involvement in the WSIS process since the Geneva phase back in 2003. It is an area to which I have personally attached great importance over the course of my two mandates and I was heartened to see Member States' shared commitment demonstrated during the most recent sessions of the Executive Board. I am pleased that the forthcoming session of the General Conference will provide another opportunity to discuss it and our future strategy with all Member States.

In preparation for that debate, and as we approach the fifth year of WSIS implementation and the half way point towards the achievement of the indicative targets of the Geneva Plan of Action, I wanted to take stock of developments and present an overview of our activities since the concluding phase of the Summit in Tunis in 2005.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

There can be no doubt that technological developments are increasingly influencing how people communicate, work, learn and live together.

Over the past five years, sustained technological development contributed to the spread of information and communication technologies - or ICTs - around the globe, bringing mobile communication to more than 4 billion people. With the number of internet users rocketing from 800 million in 2005 to 1.5 billion by the end of 2009, it is clear that some of the WSIS targets on ensuring more people can use ICTs will be reached by 2012.

Although this is good news, the growth is not evenly spread throughout the world. Internet penetration is highest in North America at 73.9%, followed by Oceania and Europe with 60.1% and 50.1% respectively. In Africa, in spite of a growth rate over the past ten years of some 1,369.9%, only 6.7% of the population has internet access. The figure for the Middle East is some 23.7%.

But development is about more than connectivity.

Today, in spite of the narrowing of the digital divide through the rapid growth rates of the number and use of mobile devices, deep knowledge divides continue to exist, both among and within countries. UNESCO's goal of building knowledge societies, one of the overarching objectives of the medium term strategy for 2008-2013, remains as relevant as ever.

Since the beginning of the WSIS process, when ICTs were identified as highly efficient tools for development, UNESCO has strongly advocated the need for a multidimensional approach focused on human development rather than technology as an end in itself.

This unique approach put the human being at the core of creating inclusive, development-oriented knowledge societies based on four key principles of freedom of expression; universal access to information and knowledge; respect for cultural and linguistic diversity; and quality education for all.

The first phase of WSIS in Geneva in 2003 endorsed this vision. At the second phase, in Tunis in 2005, I strongly advocated the need to operationalize its underpinning principles, to move beyond the notion of an information society towards knowledge societies, emphasizing that access to knowledge is the key determinant of who will prosper and advance.

The UNESCO World Report “Towards Knowledge Societies” published to coincide with the Tunis Summit developed the concept further, urging the central importance of quality education; increasing community access to information; improving science knowledge sharing; enhancing linguistic diversity; and increasing women’s contribution to knowledge societies, among others.

They linked development to inclusion, a theme that has been reflected in every activity we have taken under the Geneva Plan of Action. How we have done so will be the focus of the second part of my remarks.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO’s engagement and the acceptance of its vision of knowledge societies led to it being designated one of the overall coordinators for implementing the WSIS Plan of Action. It also facilitates the implementation of six WSIS Action Lines in its areas of competence; and largely contributes to the implementation of the WSIS Plan of Action through its regular programme and budget.

The first of these roles – shared responsibility with the International Telecommunications Union and United Nations Development Programme for facilitating the implementation of the Geneva Plan of Action – requires UNESCO to ensure coherence, maximize joint efforts, avoid duplication and enhance effectiveness among the stakeholders working to implement the eleven Action Lines. This is an important part of the UN’s efforts to deliver as one.

It also includes the organization of yearly facilitation meetings coinciding with World Information Society Day on 17 May since 2006.

A main challenge here has been to maintain momentum and high levels of engagement with the passing of time. UNESCO was actively involved in developing a new format of the annual facilitation meetings which was introduced at the “WSIS

Forum 09” in Geneva in May. I am pleased to report that our efforts paid off. Its focus on themes cutting across WSIS Action Lines such as ICTs for development, its structured networking opportunities and the high-level attendance were recognized as having great potential to renew interest in WSIS implementation and prepare the 2010 mid-term review of progress towards the 2015 targets.

In the same vein, UNESCO has established an online community platform with advanced social networking features, to enhance multi-stakeholder coordination and facilitate communication and cooperation between physical meetings.

The ultimate goal of UNESCO’s second role as facilitator of the coherent implementation of the six Action Lines for which it is responsible is to ensure that they are implemented with the greatest inclusion of stakeholders at national, regional and global levels. Those action lines are: Access to information and knowledge; E-learning; E-science; Cultural diversity and identity, linguistic diversity and local content; Media; and Ethical dimensions of the Information Society.

In its third role, UNESCO implements a large number of concrete activities which are included in the WSIS Plan of Action and, at the same time, constitute a solid part of the Organization’s own programmes.

Let me mention some examples:

In the area of access to information and knowledge, UNESCO gives high priority to providing and strengthening communication and information facilities at the level of local communities. Such facilities offer basic tools for introducing and managing community-centred development and change. To date, UNESCO has supported the establishment of Community Media and Community Multimedia Centres in 34 countries, including 19 in Africa.

The Memory of the World Programme works globally to protect original material and sensitize both the public and decision-makers about the importance of heritage and memory. I recently had the pleasure of announcing 35 new additions to the Register, bringing the total number of inscriptions to 197.

Closely linked to this programme is the recently launched World Digital Library, which makes significant primary materials from cultures around the world available free of charge on the Internet.

UNESCO's support for e-learning initiatives in all regions is enabling the education of many people in remote and rural areas. An ICT Competency Framework for Teachers has been published in 6 languages and UNESCO has developed training programmes and capacity development, such as information literacy for teachers and the use of technology for education.

An excellent example of our work to promote e-science is the Encyclopaedia of Life Support Systems (EOLSS), an on-line repository of scientific knowledge. And our work on education and capacity building through ICTs in Africa has been particularly focused on science.

To ensure equal and multilingual access to information, UNESCO supports the introduction of Internationalized Domain Names in Internet addresses. Millions of people are deprived of access to online information due to language restrictions, and the Internationalized Domain Names, to be launched in 2010, will enable Internet access for those using non-Latin scripts.

To highlight the importance of the ethical dimensions of the information society, UNESCO has hosted a series of workshops in almost all regions to stimulate reflection and debate on ethics.

Finally, and underpinning all the other areas, UNESCO strongly advocates freedom of expression and the fundamental role of free and pluralistic media both in print and cyberspace in building knowledge societies.

In this regard, a system of Media Development Indicators has been introduced and widely recognized as a standard-setting tool for analyzing media development and good governance at country level.

The MDIs have been translated into six languages and are currently being applied by coalitions of national stakeholders with UNESCO support in several pilot countries, including Croatia, Maldives, Mozambique, and Ecuador, to carry out comprehensive assessments of their respective national media landscapes. The

purpose of these studies is to produce a set of evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the development of free, independent and pluralistic media in each country.

Media Development Indicators have also guided UNESCO's inputs to numerous UNDAF programmes.

Furthermore, UNESCO enhanced journalism education is reinforced through a model curricula for journalism schools, so far adopted in 31 developing countries.

Let me also emphasize that the International Programme for the Development of Communication continues to play its role as a resource mobilization mechanism for fostering media development. To date, IPDC has supported 1,250 projects in 140 countries to the tune of some USD 100 million. This includes 244 projects supported since the WSIS Geneva summit. Currently 16 donor countries support the IPDC programme with an average annual contribution of two million dollars. This enables IPDC to support average of 80 projects annually. Though the funds provided per project are modest - between \$ 20,000 and 50,000 - the programme is the main support source financially and morally for those who are fostering free, independent and pluralistic media in the developing countries.

Of course, the Information for All Programme – IFAP - also contributes to the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines. I hope that the recently endorsed new strategic plan will enable the programme to assist Member States in formulating national information policy frameworks and fostering capacity building in five priority areas: information for development, information literacy, information preservation, information ethics and information accessibility.

These are just a few examples.

The key point is that by integrating the WSIS action plan and follow-up in the framework of UNESCO's programmes, it informs our daily work and our strategies.

The Task Force on Knowledge Societies - formerly the Task Force on the Information Society created in June 2002 - continues to ensure coherence in our approach to translating the spirit of WSIS into concrete actions, as well as to advise

me on emerging issues arising from developments in ICTs, their societal, cultural and ethical implications and to propose appropriate institutional responses.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO's role as facilitator, coordinator and implementer, together with its achievements, have resulted in an increase in the Organization's visibility and credibility as a significant actor in the area of ICT for development. More importantly, they have moved the international community ever closer towards the realization of the UNESCO promoted vision of knowledge societies.

But UNESCO cannot meet the challenges alone. The task is too immense and early on we recognized the need to forge strategic partnerships with new stakeholders from the private sector, civil society and other UN agencies. Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, Sun Microsystems and TAG-Org, a Jordanian-based international business services company, are just a few of examples of how UNESCO is collaborating with the private sector to achieve the WSIS goals, along with other internationally agreed development goals.

Bridging the knowledge divide requires vision, political will, institutional and individual capacities, and resources.

We will continue our engagement with the Summit to maintain the momentum among stakeholders, to create new partnerships and to build on numerous WSIS-related activities. UNESCO will continue to facilitate the WSIS implementation at regional and country levels, including through advocating the integration of WSIS related issues in UN wide common country planning exercises. And we will continue to address the major new trends in building knowledge societies that have emerged since the two Summit events in Geneva and Tunis.

For example, one of the important outcomes of the WSIS Tunis phase was the establishment by the UN Secretary General of the Internet Governance Forum for multi-stakeholder policy dialogue related to Internet governance.

In this arena, UNESCO has consistently highlighted that Internet governance mechanisms should be based on the principle of "openness", encompassing

interoperability, freedom of expression in knowledge societies and measures to resist any attempt to censor content.

In closing, let me express my heartfelt appreciation to Member States for their interest and support throughout the WSIS process and implementation phase.

I now look forward, with my colleagues from the Communication and Information sector to answering any questions you may have.

Thank you for your attention.