



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Organisation
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pour l'éducation,
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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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 designation
of Esther Coopersmith
as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador**

UNESCO, 8 September 2009

Madam Coopersmith,
Mr Ambassador,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to welcome you here this evening to celebrate the designation of Esther Coopersmith as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador.

We are honoured to be joined by the new Ambassador of the United States of America to UNESCO. Welcome; we look forward to working with you.

Looking back over the past decade of my mandate, one of the proudest moments was the return of the United States to UNESCO in October 2003, after 19 years of absence.

American engagement is imperative for a strong multilateralism and for a strong UNESCO, and I had made it a priority from my first day in office to bring the US back to the Organization.

Many persons contributed to this achievement. Today, I would like to pay special tribute to Esther Coopersmith, whose energy and devotion to UNESCO's ideals was a driving force in both the US return and subsequent strong re-engagement. Over the past decade, she has been an outspoken advocate for UNESCO within the US, helping to make our work better known among the American public and forge new ties and friendships.

Esther has shown a longstanding commitment to the United Nations system and the values of peace and dialogue for which it stands. Over the years, she has served as US representative to the UN, advisor to the State Department for the UN Status of Women Commission and, from 1999 to 2000, US observer to UNESCO. In fact, I met Esther for the first time during the General Conference in 1999, when I was Director-General.

Esther has an immense talent for bringing people together and inspiring them to work together for the greater good. In 1984, she became the first woman since Eleanor Roosevelt to receive the United Nations Peace Prize – a testimony to her tireless efforts to foster dialogue and understanding among different cultures and faiths, especially in the Middle East.

I am therefore delighted that Esther has chosen to focus her work as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador on intercultural dialogue, one of our top priorities.

Conflict - sometimes violent conflict – is one of the greatest challenges of modern times. UNESCO works to prevent such conflict by creating new opportunities to encourage dialogue, build partnerships and bring people together in the areas where we have expertise. This applies at all levels – from Heads of State and Government to local communities, youth groups and individuals. Our premise is that respect for diversity builds a more pluralistic and tolerant world.

Indeed, President Obama picked up on this theme earlier this year when he said that it is time to rid the world of fear and mistrust and end the “cycle of suspicion and discord” that has marred recent years.

We need to put particular emphasis on youth. Last year, with American support, we organized in Bahrain a major conference called ‘Youth at the Crossroads’. It looked at how to channel the energies of young people away from violence by directing their energy and enthusiasm towards building a better world for everyone.

This includes tapping into their passion for new technologies. One such project, of which UNESCO is especially proud, is the World Digital Library, which we launched earlier this year in partnership with the Library of Congress and over 30 other educational and cultural institutions. By providing on-line access to cultural materials from libraries and archives around the world, the project celebrates

the uniqueness of different cultures while at the same time promoting cross-cultural awareness, understanding and respect.

Esther's designation comes at a significant moment. The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2010 the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures and invited UNESCO, to play a lead role in preparing the celebrations of this Year. I am delighted that Esther will be working with the Organization in this endeavour. I am confident that her vast experience will help us to advance the values of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding so critical to building a socially cohesive, peaceful and sustainable future.

It is now my great pleasure and immense honour to designate Esther Coopersmith as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for intercultural dialogue.

I wish you every success in your new mission.

Thank you.