



United Nations
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Organización
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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

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 presentation of the publication entitled *Desarrolla
juvenil y prevención de la violencia; la experiencia centroamericana* (Youth
Development and Violence Prevention: The Central American Experience)**

UNESCO, 9 September 2009

Distinguished Permanent Delegates,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you today for the presentation of this first publication dedicated to the strategy of youth development and violence prevention in Central America.

Four years have gone by since the governments of the Central American Integration System (SICA) called UNESCO's attention to one of the most important strategic questions of our time – how to steer young people away from youth violence and provide positive channels for their hopes, energy and enthusiasm, in order to ensure a better future for all.

Youth violence is a social phenomenon which has many causes and brings a wide variety of factors into play. There is no single response to the challenge that it poses as much to the young people themselves as to the societies that suffer from its numerous consequences.

In Central America, in particular, the problems linked to mobs and youth gangs have now become actual obstacles to the sustainable development of the region.

In response to the concerns of the Central American countries that are affected by this complex and increasingly serious situation, UNESCO devised and implemented, in 2005, a multi-sectoral strategy for Youth Development and Violence Prevention.

This strategy, whose actions are based on prevention, has enabled us, with the generous support of the Japan Trust Fund and assistance from Italian cooperation,

to launch projects in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala. Another such project came into being this year in the Dominican Republic.

Considering that young people are both the victims and perpetrators of violent acts and crimes, each national project seeks to find creative solutions in order to break the vicious cycle of violence and promote youth development and civic participation.

In coordination with the UNESCO Office in San José, Costa Rica, and with the cooperation of the UNESCO Offices in Brazil, Chile and Ecuador, hundreds of innovative activities have been carried out that were specifically designed for young people and involved their participation, in order to promote their reintegration into the education system and develop their creativity, as well as their work-related and entrepreneurial abilities.

The projects also include numerous activities aimed at training teachers and school and family advisers, conducting research in support of youth policy formulation, and promoting awareness in order to improve the image of young people in the media.

To this same end, and with the emphasis on exchange of information and good practices, UNESCO has provided the venue for the holding of the Forum of Ministers and High-ranking Officials responsible for Youth in Central America.

This Forum, which has held two sessions, in 2007 and 2009, has promoted dialogue and cooperation between the governments of the region in order to create a common awareness about the importance of youth development in the prevention of violence, and contributed towards the promotion of a culture of prevention in Central America.

Distinguished Permanent Delegates,

In the four years that have passed since the launching of the strategy, the converging efforts of UNESCO, international cooperation and the different national and local governmental actors, in close collaboration with the communities and their young people, have made prevention a value and a fundamental element in confronting a complex social problem that affects Central America and many other regions of the world.

I wish to take this opportunity to express particular gratitude to Dr Gonzalo Abad-Ortiz, who has been the champion and efficient coordinator of the strategy. Gonzalo

has kept me constantly informed of its progress, which I have always followed with great interest.

I am convinced that this experience, which is embodied in the publication being presented today, will be a seed that will grow, and I may recall here that prevention based on dialogue, community participation, respect for rights and the opening up of opportunities for the disadvantaged and vulnerable segments of youth in society, constitutes a powerful tool for resolving conflicts and reducing violence.

I wish to thank the Central American governments for the goodwill they have shown, for their collaboration and for their commitment to this important initiative.

Thank you.