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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
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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 Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the Inauguration ceremony
of the Exhibition
“Iraq: UNESCO Post Conflict Response”**

UNESCO, 14 September 2009

Your Excellency Mr Muhyi K. Alkhateeb, Permanent Delegate of Iraq to UNESCO,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to open this exhibition on UNESCO's post conflict/post disaster (PCPD) response in Iraq, and in the presence of His Excellency Ambassador Alkhateeb, Permanent Delegate of Iraq to UNESCO.

At the outset, I would like to thank the Ambassador for his tireless efforts to see this initiative take fruition, and congratulate him on the results. I would also like to acknowledge the generous contribution of the Government of Japan, which has helped make this event possible.

This showcase exhibition presents the wide spectrum of UNESCO's work in Iraq and the Organization's unique strategic approach in PCPD situations - namely, to bridge the gap between emergency and early recovery by focussing on the rehabilitation of national and local capacity in all the areas of our competence. I hope it will give you a much clearer sense of how UNESCO's work is applicable and, indeed, essential to a holistic post conflict approach.

The key point I wish to make here is that our PCPD work is not a departure from our mandate. On the contrary and as the exhibition illustrates so aptly, standard UNESCO interventions, such as for the restoration of a historical site or the provision of textbooks, take on an added dimension in a country experiencing or attempting to move past civil conflict so as to make a meaningful transition to

development. This is one of the core messages that I tried to convey during my first official visit to Baghdad on 7 May last.

Allow me a moment to give you a few concrete examples. In Samara, UNESCO was involved in the restoration of the Al-Askari Shrine, a project supported generously by the European Commission and the Government of Iraq. Beyond the physical rebuilding of this historical holy site, the project has made a significant contribution to the reconciliation process in Iraq, stimulating active cooperation between religious communities in a very positive manner. Today, the Shrine is once again an active place of worship, where national faith has been renewed and the local economy reinvigorated.

UNESCO's activities also help hold the fabric of Iraqi society together. For example, the Organization's support for the holding of national exams in 2003 meant that an entire school year was not lost for thousands of Iraqi students; and their access to education has been enhanced through the distribution of millions of textbooks, the creation of *Textbooks Online* and the recent launch of the *Educational Television* satellite channel.

UNESCO's support for freedom of expression is also making important contributions to the reconstruction and reconciliation process. It helps inform the emerging democratic process and, through the encouragement of initiatives such as the *Professional Code of Conduct* for broadcasts, as well as safety training, helps Iraqi journalists and media organizations avoid contributing to conflict and remain safe as they carry out their journalistic duties.

The reintegration of Iraq into the trans-boundary water dialogue project, for its part, opens opportunities for dispute mechanisms with neighbouring countries in a region where this precious resource is scarce. Mapping and conserving the ancient system of Kahrez wells not only conserves local knowledge, but also promises to contribute to a sustainable water system.

These actions represent the added value of UNESCO's traditional areas of action in the particular settings of post conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This exhibition demonstrates another important element – UNESCO's strong emphasis, in all its actions, on country ownership and participation through partnership with national and local authorities. The benefit of this is that local capacities to manage the rehabilitation and development processes are enhanced, and this can only add to ensuring sustainability.

I believe the Iraq experience shows clearly that UNESCO's ability to advise on the overall development of evidence-based educational, scientific, cultural and media policies that reinforce sustainable transition from emergency contexts to reconstruction and development is vital in PCPD contexts.

The Organization may not be a humanitarian agency, but its presence is clearly of value from the very beginning of a crisis because of its bridging capacity, which meets urgent needs on the one hand, and helps lay the foundation for recovery and development on the other.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

If I have spoken at length here today, it is because I am very proud of what UNESCO has been able to achieve in Iraq in full partnership with the Government of Iraq, the UN family, and major donors such as the European Commission and the Governments of Japan, Qatar and Germany.

I do encourage you to visit the exhibition and participate in the many events taking place this week, all of which demonstrate these achievements.

Thank you for your attention.