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**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of
International Day for the Eradication of Poverty
“Children and families speak out against poverty”**

17 October 2009

Poverty kills and mercilessly destroys families. Consequently, today we invite children and families to raise their voices against poverty.

The theme of this 2009 International Day for the Eradication of Poverty is even more fitting in that this year marks the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. And what is poverty if not a violation of basic human rights, all the more so of the rights of the child, in whom our hopes for the future lie? Is it not a menace to the cohesion of families, who transmit the essential values of our societies from generation to generation?

UNESCO fully supports the United Nations' commitment to eradicating poverty, one of the priority concerns of Millennium Development Goals. Thus, we have decided to wage this fight by addressing in the first place the theme of education and equal opportunity.

Indeed, as the 2009 edition of the Education for All Global Monitoring Report points out, unequal opportunities for education fuel poverty, hunger and child mortality. Inequality also reduces prospects for economic growth.

There are still some 75 million children worldwide, half of whom are girls, currently out of school. In developing countries, one in three children of primary school age have had their brain development and education prospects impaired by malnutrition.

Girls often bear the brunt of economic slumps; they are the first to be taken out of school and sent to work. And yet, we know that girls' education has a substantial multiplier effect on development – improving health, fertility rates and increasing family income.

Just as rapid and decisive action was needed to counter the financial crisis that rocked the planet this year, we must show the same determination in the face of another challenge, which is equally critical: guaranteeing social justice, equality and the right to education for the most vulnerable population groups around the world. For the sake of economic development, social cohesion and peace.

Koïchiro Matsuura