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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,
UNESCO Forum for Gender Equality – 7th session
“Beijing: 15 Years After”**

UNESCO, 19 October 2009

Ambassador Killion,
Ambassador Vermeer,
Ambassador Shi Shuyun,
Ambassador and Director-General elect Bokova,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to tonight's event, which focuses on an issue at the heart of UNESCO's work: women's empowerment and gender equality.

In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing placed women's empowerment at the core of the global, development agenda. It stressed that empowering women has far reaching impacts on society as a whole. The critical concerns discussed at the Beijing Conference were underlined in the Platform for Action. They included the persistent burden of poverty on women, unequal access to education and health care, violence against women, the impact of armed combat, political and economic inequality, lack of respect for the human rights of women, stereotyping of women in the media, gender inequalities in natural resources management and discrimination against girls. Yet, today in 2009, these issues remain unresolved. We all need to do more and better in these areas.

However, I did not come here today to present you with a bleak picture of the extent of the challenges ahead. On the contrary, today's meeting embodies not only the positive commitment, but also the concrete steps which are being taken to work

towards women's empowerment and gender equality at the national and international levels. The august assembly of women I share the Podium with this evening is a testament to how far we have come.

UNESCO has, upon my proposal, made gender equality one of our two global priorities. Director-General elect Bokova has, on many occasions, reiterated her commitment to this global priority and I am confident that she will take this Priority further under her leadership. It is a privilege to have her here tonight not only as the first woman to take the helm of this Organization on 15 November, but also because she was present in Beijing when the Platform for Action was adopted.

It is also an honour and privilege to welcome Ambassador Verveer to UNESCO this evening, who was nominated by President Obama as the US Global Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues in early 2009.

The White House described the unprecedented creation of this position as a reflection of the "elevated importance of global women's issues to the President and his entire Administration." Ambassador Verveer has a long-standing commitment to this issue as the co-founder of the organization Vital Voices Global Partnership, an organization that identifies, trains and empowers women leaders.

I am also honoured to welcome Ambassador Shi Shuyun whose country hosted the 4th World Conference in 1995. She has been a supporter of UNESCO's Priority Gender Equality and along with Ambassador Bokova; she was one of the Ambassadors to participate in UNESCO's International Women's Day Round Table in March 2009.

UNESCO knows that tackling gender inequalities demands international cooperation and partnerships. This is why we are especially pleased to welcome our three esteemed panellists as it is only through dialogue, joint efforts and sharing knowledge that we can sustainably work towards women's empowerment and gender equality.

Thank you very much for your attention.