

## **SECOND PHASE OF WSIS, 16-18 NOVEMBER, TUNIS**

### **STATEMENT BY MR KOICHIRO MATSUURA, DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO) 17 NOVEMBER 2005**

Mr. President of the World Summit on the Information Society,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Within the two phases of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), UNESCO has consistently promoted the concept of building knowledge societies. Clearly, knowledge societies are not yet a fact, at least not in much of the world. By presenting a vision of what such societies might become, we have sought to widen the range of choice and possible action.

In making this contribution, we have highlighted four key principles, namely: freedom of expression; quality education for all; universal access to information and knowledge; and respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. These four principles are vital for understanding why UNESCO has advocated a shift from "information" to "knowledge" as the key dimension of emerging forms of society.

We have also given emphasis to the concept that knowledge societies should be inclusive, pluralistic, equitable, open and participatory. UNESCO believes that, at this crucial formative stage in their development, knowledge societies should be shaped and driven not simply by technological forces but also by societal choices. These choices, furthermore, should be informed by democratic debate, expert opinion and consultation with civil society.

After the Geneva phase, UNESCO moved promptly to operationalize UNESCO's principles on how to build knowledge societies through many concrete actions, all related to the WSIS Plan of Action, a major part of which falls under UNESCO's competence.

In the lead-up to the Tunis phase, UNESCO organized four thematic meetings that placed high importance on fostering multi-stakeholder partnerships, a key aspect of our engagement with the WSIS process. Working with and through these multi-stakeholder partnerships, UNESCO stands ready to play its part in ensuring implementation and follow-up of the outcomes and commitments reached during the WSIS process and the Geneva and Tunis phases of the Summit.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In order to further inform discussion and exchange on these vital issues, we have recently published the *UNESCO World Report 2005: "Towards Knowledge Societies "*. The report stresses that knowledge is the object of huge economic, political and cultural stakes, to the point of determining who will prosper and who will advance.

The report's recommendations particularly take up the ethical dimension of knowledge societies and call for improvements and changes in several areas. Time forbids any extensive elaboration of the report here but I would like to highlight the central importance of quality education and knowledge-sharing. I believe there is much scope for innovative approaches to e-learning and for further thought about knowledge-sharing as not only a development imperative but also an ethical transaction.

This sharing is inconceivable without freedom of expression. In this year when UNESCO is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary, it is important to affirm what UNESCO's Constitution calls "the free exchange of ideas and knowledge" as a foundational value of all societies.

The Report will inform the deliberations of the leaders and participants attending the High Level Round Table that I am hosting this afternoon. The Round Table will consider how to build equitable and inclusive knowledge societies and how to harness the potential of knowledge and put it at the service of sustainable development.

For UNESCO, building knowledge societies is about building a better future for all nations and peoples.

Indeed, the 191 Member States gathered at UNESCO's General Conference last month in Paris gave clear encouragement for us to fulfil our role, which focuses our concrete action on such areas as media, access to information and knowledge, capacity-building, e-learning, e-science, ethical issues, and cultural and linguistic diversity.

Thank you.