



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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 Valedictory Session
of the 4th International Conference
on Environmental Education**

Ahmedabad, India, 28 November 2007

Professor Hopkins,

Dr A. A. Boaz, Director General, South Asia Cooperative
Environment Programme (SACEP),

Professor M.S. Swaminathan, Chairman, M. S. Swaminathan
Research Foundation,

Professor Kartikeya V Sarabhai, Director, Centre for Environment Education,
Ahmedabad,

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to address you this afternoon at this valedictory session of the Fourth International Conference on Environmental Education (ICEE) here in Ahmedabad, India. Let me take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Government of India for hosting this international conference, to UNEP for joining with UNESCO in cosponsoring the meeting, to the many organizations and agencies that have associated themselves with this event and, last but not least, to the Centre for Environment Education and its Director, Professor Sarabhai, for all their efforts of preparation and organization and for making everyone feel so welcome. I would like to thank all participants for their valuable contributions. I have learnt that around 1,500 people from nearly 90 countries have travelled from near and far to take part in this major event. Let me congratulate all of you for making this international conference an undoubted success.

As you know, this meeting in Ahmedabad is a follow-up to the three previous international conferences on environmental education organized or co-organized by UNESCO in Tbilisi (1977), Moscow (1987) and Thessaloniki (1997). Each played its part in the unfolding story of the role of education in relation to sustainable development, and this meeting in Ahmedabad will make its own distinctive contribution. It is too early to tell, of course, what that contribution will be. For this, we need the perspective and wisdom of hindsight.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although my very busy agenda made it difficult to get here before this afternoon, I am pleased that UNESCO was active and well represented at this conference – through presentations in plenary and working groups, by organizing or co-organizing working groups and side events, and by participating in many activities. I trust we have shown ourselves to be a good and reliable partner in this very interactive endeavour.

A distinctive feature of our involvement is that we have called upon a real cross-section of the Organization – from different sectors at Headquarters; from our specialized institutes; and from regional bureaux and field offices near and far. It has been a real team effort and I would like to thank all of its members for their efforts and contributions, which have ranged from education for sustainable consumption to biosphere reserves and world heritage sites as learning laboratories for sustainable development, and on to media and public awareness-raising. Finally, my particular thanks go to Minja Yang, Director of the UNESCO office in New Delhi, and her team and to Mark Richmond, Director of the Division for the Coordination of UN Priorities in Education, and Aline Bory-Adams, chief of the Section for Education for Sustainable Development and their team, based at our headquarters in Paris, for their sustained engagement and hard work.

All of our contributions to this conference have occurred in the framework of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, for which UNESCO is the lead agency and international coordinator. Please note that this does not make it a UNESCO Decade – it is, of course, a United Nations Decade, voted into being unanimously by the UN General Assembly in 2002. In fulfilling its stewardship role, UNESCO has not sought to impose a particular interpretation of what ESD is or should be, nor has it tried to privilege a particular strategy of implementation.

Instead, we have consulted widely and we have paid close attention to the views and concerns of many stakeholders. As a result of this approach, UNESCO has developed a global framework to guide Member States and other partners in implementing the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development that is broad, flexible and inclusive.

In particular, we have recognized that different stakeholders are at different stages of engagement with ESD and the Decade, and we have sought to respect that by making available a range of entry points that correspond to different needs and circumstances. This means that countries are encouraged to take part at the speed, and in the manner, they judge best. Countries must be firmly in the driving seat. Nevertheless, at the same time, we have been acutely conscious of the fact that we are all riding in the same vehicle and we don't want to lose any passengers. By the way, the energy driving this vehicle, in case you were wondering, is highly renewable – it is a potent mixture of shared concern and good will.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like next to provide a brief overview of the main discussions that took place over the past 2 days and a half – which is a virtually impossible task. In order to do so, I will highlight ten key aspects of the conference which stand out from the point of view of UNESCO.

First, the importance of the contribution of environmental education to education for sustainable development (ESD) and to the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) is very clear and I am pleased to acknowledge this. The Decade can only be enriched by the contributions of environmental education through research, education and training, advocacy and networking.

Second, there is a palpable sense of urgency for the right decisions to be made and the right actions to be taken in a timely way, which effectively means before it is too late. This is not alarmism but realism. A great boost to understanding the urgency of the situation has come from the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) whose chairman, Dr Pachauri, graciously found time in his busy schedule to address the inaugural session of the conference. I do hope that, ten years from now, we do not look back and say that too little was done too late.

Third, all teaching and learning modalities need to be effectively harnessed. This requires that non-formal and informal approaches to environmental education and ESD should be recognized as just as important as the formal education system. This in turn calls for those institutions, organizations and agencies responsible for organizing and delivering these different aspects of education to be respected for their separate and combined contributions. The role of civil society in regard to non-formal education and the key contribution of the media to informal education and awareness-raising are cases in point. To get the best from formal, non-formal and informal education, the roles of different partners must be respected and supported.

Fourth, teachers are the cornerstone of effective ESD programmes. Therefore, we must put a premium on the initial preparation of new teachers and on their in-service professional development in the area of ESD and environmental education. But there is another aspect of the importance of teachers, namely, teachers are always 'local' and, to make ESD relevant and real to learners, they must draw upon local inputs, contexts and values as well as foster community ownership of the curriculum.

Fifth, it is necessary to unpack the category 'learners' in order to devise and implement suitably targeted approaches. This in turn requires us to look carefully and strategically at what we really want different types of learners to learn. For example, it is certainly desirable to make leaders – in such fields as politics, business, the media, and the professions – more aware of and sensitive to sustainable development issues. But what exactly should they learn, in what ways and for what purposes? These questions, in fact, must be asked about all learners, recognizing that their learning needs and goals are different and change over time.

Sixth, a clear theme emerging from the conference is the importance of research into ESD along with the effective dissemination and utilization of research results. Given the scarcity of resources, it is essential to determine a research agenda with priorities of focus and emphasis. And the uses of research should not be an afterthought – the research priorities must aim to inform and improve policy and practice.

Seventh, one of the important benefits of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development thus far is that it has stimulated the launch of serious work on monitoring and evaluation and on the development of indicators. All participants in

the conference will surely recognize the importance of this work, though it is evident that there are significant methodological and capacity development issues here that need to be addressed urgently.

Eighth, one of the hallmarks of the sustainable development debate has been the relation between the global and the local. That relation, of course, is mediated at several levels and through a variety of institutions. It is interesting to see in the conference the engagement with different frames of reference for ESD and environmental education, ranging from school-based practices to municipal agreements, from national government strategies on ESD to zoo education strategies. Each of these, and there are many other examples, is a fascinating vector for capturing the dynamic link between the global and the local.

Ninth, this conference reminds us once again that the boundaries of sectors, disciplines of study and fields of expertise constrain our capacities to think and act just as the boundaries of nations, gender, religion and ethnicity are artificial constructs that constrain our common humanity - if we let them. I believe that, as this conference clearly demonstrates, ESD is a great vehicle for respecting our differences and building a common vision.

Tenth, last but not least, the conference has done a great service by stressing the importance of the voice of youth, to which we must all listen. This can be taken literally to refer to young people and their energy, enthusiasm, commitment and hope. But it can also be taken metaphorically to refer to that spirit of creativity, experiment and openness which is the spark of youth in all of us.

These ten points, together with the Ahmedabad Declaration you have just adopted and the recommendations arising from the plenary and working sessions, provide very good guidelines for UNESCO's action in education for sustainable development over the next ten years, as well as for the activities of our partners. I hope we can cooperate in their implementation.

Let me close by congratulating you all for making the conference such a rewarding experience. Special thanks again must go to the Centre for Environment Education and its Director for organizing this event and hosting it in this marvellous learning environment. Be assured that UNESCO will engage seriously with the recommendations emerging from the conference and with the Declaration, which is

truly a collective effort. Although my own term of office ends in two years' time, I feel secure in committing UNESCO to continuing its support for this pattern of international conferences. I do so in the firm knowledge that Charles Hopkins, who holds a UNESCO chair relating to ESD at York University, Canada, and has attended all four meetings, will be at the next International Conference on Environmental Education in 2017!

Thank you.