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# UNESCO

Statement to the 52nd Session of  
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On the occasion of this 52<sup>nd</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, I would like to begin by noting that UNESCO has recently decided to strengthen its commitment to promote women's empowerment and gender equality by designating gender equality as one of only two global priorities for the Organization in its new Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013.

UNESCO's firm commitment in this direction is based on a broad-based request by its Member States and on the Organization's conviction that gender equality is a basic human right and a precondition for achieving the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

UNESCO's strategic commitment to gender equality is translated into action through the "Priority Gender Equality Action Plan for 2008-2013", currently being drafted through a consultative and participatory process involving all Secretariat stakeholders. In the meantime, this commitment is reflected in the Programming and Budget for 2008-2009 in the following areas:

In the domain of Education, as the lead agency of the Education for All (EFA), UNESCO will continue to dedicate significant resources to the achievement of gender equality in basic education and to the promotion of women's literacy through the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE) programme.

In the domain of the Natural Sciences, UNESCO will focus on scaling-up mainstreaming efforts in the water sciences, disaster prevention, climate change and in its work with small island developing states, with specific attention paid to ensuring gender balance in networks and experts panels. The Sector will also

continue its work to promote women in science and technology through the L'Oréal-UNESCO "For Women in Science" partnership.

The Social and Human Sciences Sector has been establishing a clearing house on gender policies of relevance to UNESCO's fields of competence, and will continue to give support to the Palestinian Women's Research Centre and for the consolidation of the Great Lakes Women's Research and Documentation Centre.

The Culture Sector will continue to mainstream gender equality considerations into tangible and intangible world heritage policies and programmes. As part of UNESCO's programmes on Culture, HIV & AIDS, the Sector will also work to enable and inform the development of culturally appropriate and gender-responsive HIV & AIDS policies and programmes.

Finally, the Communication and Information Sector will continue its work to empower women in the domain of Information and Communication Technology (ICTs), in particular through the creation of community multimedia centres and open learning communities, which seek to empower women through ICTs and to promote their active role in the management of these centres.

This reflects only part of UNESCO's programming in support of women's empowerment and gender equality. UNESCO considers investments in women's empowerment and gender equality as money well spent not the least because of the multiplier effect. As we all know, when money is spent to teach a girl to read, or to teach a woman emergency preparedness measures, or to empower her to manage local water resources, the investment doesn't end with that single girl or woman. The benefits spread to her children, her family, her local community, and the society at large.

In this forum we are all aware of the many reasons for which it is smart and just economics, smart management and smart partnerships to augment funding for women's empowerment and gender equality. The question that we need to address is not *why*, but *how* to secure financing for gender equality and women's empowerment.

UNESCO feels that in a remarkably short time it has succeeded in achieving a visible prioritization of gender equality within the Organization, as well as an increase in financial support to gender equality initiatives, despite the Organization's financial limitations. So I would like to share with you, very briefly, what I think to be two key lessons learned:

- 1. Look to the top and find allies.** Internal support from top-level decision-makers is one of the most important pre-conditions to guaranteeing support – both financial and other – for gender equality within an organization. UNESCO has been lucky to find gender equality allies in several high-level decision makers, not the least of which is our Director General, Koïchiro Matsuura, who in many ways set the ball rolling for gender equality at UNESCO by implementing mandatory capacity building and training for gender mainstreaming for all professional staff since September 2005. It was also in part thanks to high-level allies' efforts that UNESCO designated gender equality a global priority for the 2008-2013 Medium-Term Strategy. In March 2007, UNESCO officially launched the Group of Women Ambassadors for Gender Equality – a voluntary network open to both women and men who represent their countries at UNESCO and in its governing bodies.
- 2. Look to outside sources for financial support.** While the importance of high-level internal support cannot be underestimated, even the highest-level support cannot overcome the budgetary restrictions that many, if not most, of our entities are dealing with today. It is therefore increasingly necessary to seek support from external sources. As the Report of the September 2007

Expert Group Meeting on “Financing for gender equality and the empowerment of women” points out, while most other sources of funding for women’s rights and gender equality have been dwindling in recent years, “there has been an upward trend with other actors in private philanthropy, which includes smaller private foundations, family foundations, individual philanthropists and corporate funding.”

UNESCO has experienced this first-hand through its recent partnership with the Sony Ericsson Women’s Tennis Association Tour. Through this partnership, UNESCO will be able to provide funding for gender equality and women’s leadership projects around the world, starting with projects in Cameroon, the Dominican Republic, Liberia, China, and Jordan. Needless to say, we would never have been able to even consider underwriting these projects were it not for the partnership.

It is not my intention to present private philanthropy as a panacea. As our Director General recently pointed out at the IANWGE – Gendernet joint biennial workshop in Paris, private philanthropy “cannot and should not take the place of bilateral or multilateral funding; however, given the tremendous resources needed to achieve international commitments to gender equality and empower women” private philanthropy should be sought out and encouraged as an indispensable complement.

It is for this reason that UNESCO has decided to hold a high-level International Round Table this 10 March, entitled *Gender Equality: Make it Your Business* as part of its annual celebrations of International Women’s Day. The Round Table will bring together philanthropists and fundraisers in an attempt to highlight trends in funding for women’s rights, women’s empowerment and gender equality with special attention to the increasing role of private philanthropy.

As the UN reform progresses, we also need to reflect on how to enhance activities especially at the country level to advance gender equality – by “delivering as one”, through UNDAF exercises and other common country programming tools. In particular, it will be necessary to keep “gender equality” at the top of the agenda. Let there be no doubt, it is an issue critical for development and for the success of any and all operational activities.

Gender equality is a basic human right. It is a precondition for achieving the MDGs and other development goals. It is widely recognized as “smart economics.” Given all these and other factors, we should not need to turn to outside sources for financial support for gender equality: we should already have it. Yet if we are going to succeed in securing sustainable funding for gender equality, and keeping it on the map as a global priority, one thing is clear: we are going to have to be realistic and pragmatic and not leave any stone unturned. After all, working towards gender equality is the responsibility of each and every one of us and the cost of the work involved in achieving it is far less than the tremendous human, social and economic cost of not achieving it.

Thank you.

