

Honorable Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my particular pleasure to be here today and share with you the feeling of gratitude and appreciation for this recognition. May I also cordially thank you for the high trust shown in me, by bestowing upon me this distinguished title of the UNESCO Good Will Ambassador for the Construction of Knowledge Societies.

On your invitation, Mr. Director General, today I join the family of UNESCO. It is both a great honor and no less a great responsibility.

I believe that today UNESCO's role has become central in many respects. We live in a world of rapid changes accelerated by globalization. These changes may be left to their own course or subjected only to the laws of free market. But at least partly they can also be projected and coordinated. Active position of UNESCO in this process would no doubt contribute to the predictability and coordination of transformations in the world.

Globalisation and advance of information technologies that accompanies it continuously raises new challenges to the global community. Also, it has disclosed now more clearly than before the growing gap between the developed and underdeveloped states and nations, as well as the divide between the rich and the poor, the educated and barely literate people. This process will continue to be a source of new tensions in the world.

Therefore today we face a crucial task of humanizing and harmonizing this process of globalization. Here, I believe, UNESCO could play a central role. The family of UNESCO nations could call upon their considerable experience and expertise, and join efforts in order to preserve the values that have been guiding the mankind throughout its history, and to maintain at the basis of human development the principles of freedom, solidarity and mutual trust.

Through participation in building the global knowledge society UNESCO would contribute to the humanization of contemporary world, and help to sustain and expand the dialogue among civilizations, nations and cultures.

Knowledge society should not be seen only as a community with broad access to information and communication technologies. Knowledge society is much more than that. It is an educated and intelligent

community of free people. It is a society, the members of which not only have free access to information accumulated in the world, but also appreciate wisdom, communication and cooperation. Knowledge society should be seen as an active civil society, the members of which can and are able to participate in decision making process at different levels.

Building such a knowledge in a society would not be possible without ensuring the freedom of expression and free exchange of information, without guaranteeing access to education. These are the tasks that cannot be achieved only by applying free market principles. Their fulfillment requires concerted efforts of governments, business, non-governmental sector and international organizations.

In this context information and communication technologies are a very efficient tool, but only a tool. Our task is to apply this tool with greatest effect for ensuring access to education, for developing national cultures and strengthening the dialogue among them. ICTs can help us today preserve the variety of civilizations, cultural diversity and multilingualism. For example, with the help of the Internet a French, a Japanese or a Lithuanian can receive in any part of the world all necessary information in his or her native tongue.

But knowledge society should not be narrowed to information community. Knowledge society needs wisdom. It needs knowledge based on morale, and common human values and principles. Without these values, without solidarity among people and nations, without joint efforts we could hardly expect to build a mature knowledge society.

Mr. Director General,
Dear friends,

Building the global knowledge society is an ambitious and daring project. But its successful realization would contribute to a greater harmony and more hope in contemporary world that is full of tensions and contradictions.

Thank you very much