Opening Address

By

H. E. Mr. Zhang Xinsheng

Chairman of the Executive Board

Paris, 2 October 2006
Mr President of the General Conference
Mr Director-General
Distinguished Representatives
Excellencies
Colleagues
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1.1 It is a great honour and pleasure to see you all again here in UNESCO House for the 175th session of the Executive Board. Please be sincerely welcomed. This session holds much promise. We are moving close to the date of 6 November when the year-long celebrations of the 60th anniversary the Organization draw to a close. We should seek to recall those momentous times, sixty years ago, when an Organization the world so badly needed saw the light of day and sat down at its first General Conference. Can we not all still today feel the thrill of those days, and the weight of the noble responsibilities the world community was placing on the shoulders of this new Organization? Let us ponder this as we proactively and progressively map out the long-term future of the Organization, thus ensuring its successful continuation for the next 60 years.

1.2 Before sharing with you some of my thoughts on the key issues to which I feel we will need to pay particular attention during this session, I should first like to pay tribute to our colleagues who have been called upon to assume other important functions since our previous session, and who have made an important contribution to the work of the Executive Board during their mandate. On your behalf, I wish to convey my sincere appreciation to Amb. Charbonneau from Canada, Amb. Sato from Japan, Mr Rana from Nepal, and Ms Lopez from Venezuela. I should like to express the Board’s special gratitude to Amb. Moozova from the Czech Republic, who ably fulfilled her duties as Vice-Chairperson of the Board for Group II, and to Ms Inayatullah from Pakistan, for the invaluable services and extraordinary wisdom she placed in the service of UNESCO and, in particular of this Board. We wish all our former colleagues success in the exercise of their new functions.

1.3 May I now extend my warm greetings to the distinguished Representatives who replace them: Mr Svoboda (Czech Republic), Amb. Kondo (Japan), Mr Basnyat (Nepal), Mr Bashar (Pakistan) and Mr Arnaldo Perez (Venezuela). We all look forward to working in close collaboration with you and hope to benefit from the fresh ideas that you will want to share with us on this Board.

1.4 We also welcome the Ambassadors of Croatia, the Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Estonia, Mauritius, Norway, Slovenia and Spain, and, on the same occasion, thank their predecessors for their contribution to UNESCO’s work.

1.5 Let us bid them a warm welcome with a round of applause.

1.6 In order to prepare for this important session, I have been rather busy and active during the past six months – as have my colleagues, particularly the Members of the Bureau. I should like to share with you some of the major events that I attended or actions that were taken.

1.7 I attached primary importance to attending three of the five Regional Consultations on the C/4 and C/5 thus meeting well over 700 constituents of our Organization. Indeed,
I was very delighted to have met with so many heads of National Commissions and Field Offices. I witnessed first-hand UNESCO’s role at the country level and listened to many of the concerns and expectations raised by Member States at national and regional levels. Indeed these consultations are a very good bottom-up approach to programming. I was quickly impressed by the results of post-conflict assistance while in Angola; I noted the growing pace of development while in Hanoi, and understood better the different needs and expectations of Member States when I attended the Athens consultations. If just one message were to come out of these consultations, it would have to be the continued commitment to UNESCO’s core mandate.

1.8 I was invited to attend the celebrations of coming into force of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage during the first general assembly of its States Parties. I attended the opening of the 30th ordinary session of the World Heritage Committee, and I also attended a day of reflection on extrabudgetary activities here at Headquarters under the stewardship of the Chairman of FA Commission, Ambassador Yaï. I must express my thanks to all for the manner in which these meetings were organized, hosted and conducted.

1.9 I was pleased to see the way in which the Russian Federation ensured adequate recognition for the Global Action Plan for EFA while I attended the G-8 Summit in Moscow I must likewise commend the efforts of UNESCO’s Honorary Ambassador for the Decade of Literacy who organized the White House Conference of Global Literacy.

1.10 And finally, I must also underscore the fruitful nature of the regular consultations that both the President of the General Conference and I have held with the Director-General on our respective responsibilities in addressing the recommendations of 33 C/Resolution 92 para.5 of the General Conference concerning relations between the three organs of UNESCO. We are indeed truly moving forward to achieving fully harmonious relations amongst the three organs.

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2.1.1 Dear Colleagues, I fully believe that this session of the Board will be a critical session for charting the future of our Organization. There are three features which I feel we should bear in mind during our business: firstly a mixed world situation experiencing conflicts at the same times as positive signs in terms of development cooperation; secondly globalization and increased competition, and thirdly UN and UNESCO reforms. I will develop each of these ideas interdependently.

2.1.2 While progress continues to be made towards increased development cooperation and greater international understanding, both bi-laterally and in multi-lateral fora, I can observe with sadness and regret that such positive advancements in humanity’s relations are sometimes overshadowed by regional and intra-national conflicts. Despite greater contributions to international development cooperation, people throughout the world still experience insecurity because of persistent poverty and the lack of means to eke out a living as well as through the real or perceived threat of terrorism. Ignorance of the other remains a source for hatred and violence – and hence this must be a concern for UNESCO which is called to promote knowledge about others notably through intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. Unfortunately, various developments call into question the noble objectives towards peace and
development and greater international cooperation that are the main vocation of UNESCO. Our overarching commitment must be to build and strengthen international peace and security.

2.1.3 Therefore, as I just stipulated, UNESCO’s principal mission is, as our Constitution states: “to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among nations through education, science and culture.” Our Founding Fathers rightly believed that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”. UNESCO’s principal purpose is thus to build peace, which is not the same as keeping peace. It was ignorance and hatred that caused the dreadful war out of whose rubble this Organization rose up, and it is still that abiding mission, building sustainable world peace through education, the sciences, culture and communication and information, that is our mighty task. No other Organization within the UN system is equal to this challenge.

2.1.4 Dear Colleagues, The speed of globalization affects ever more tangibly our daily lives, whether we want it to happen or not. With increased globalization, great advances have been achieved for humanity in the fields of science and technology. There is an ever-increasing amount of wealth being generated through this progress, and human contact is ever swifter and easier over great expanses.

2.1.5 These advancements bring with them an increasingly prevalent sense of competition. Competition spawns new ideas, and new ideas beget further competition. There is no place in the world where competition has not been the driving force behind change. I posit, therefore, that UNESCO must embrace this context, and stand up to this increasing competition confidently and firmly in order to effect change in what this Organization does, and how it does it.

2.1.6 We have been speaking of reforms – both within the UN system, and here at UNESCO – for some time now. The principal driving force of reform is a quest for improved efficiency and to better meet the expectations of Member States and the peoples of the world in delivering expected results. A pervasive scepticism as to the ability of the UN system to deliver high quality services makes further change inevitable. We must engage in a reform process that puts to the test our ability to bring about change and to adapt to the challenges confronting the world community and particularly UNESCO.

2.1.7 And yet, as with any human endeavour, there are imperfections, and it is proving to be quite challenging to come to an agreement as to what types of reforms are needed, for whom, by whom and when. In this regard, however, we can gain much insight from the past six or seven years of internal reforms undertaken within UNESCO. Indeed the reform process here has already produced some good results and helps us to tackle more confidently the dynamics of reform expected from us within the global UN context. I am sure the Director-General has shared his experiences with the High Level Panel on Coherence. UNESCO’s reforms have thus sown the seeds for our Organization’s receptiveness to opportunities and eagerness to take up the challenges that lie ahead. More comprehensive change is likely to await us, affecting the whole UN system.

2.2.1 Dear Colleagues, we have 52 items on our agenda. As we begin our work, let us remind ourselves once again of our own responsibilities for delivering results to the
body that elected us – the General Conference – and keep our sights on the major objectives, addressing certain items with appropriate efficiency and conciseness while saving our main energies for the overriding goals of our session.

2.2.2 In this regard, we shall certainly be wishing to examine in detail the current Education Sector reform inasmuch as it responds to UNESCO’s role as lead agency for Education for All and to the challenges of implementation and subsequent impact of the Global Action Plan for EFA.

2.2.3 By the same token, we will also be discussing items relating to science, technology and innovation. The scope of change ushered in over the past years in these vital fields really justifies a hard look at what the Organization is doing in the sciences, how it is performing and what the apparent trends will demand from us in the future. Here our deliberations will be aided by the ongoing review of the corresponding two major programme areas. I would think that we as a governing body of the Organisation will also have a responsibility to reflect on these particular challenges.

2.2.4 I feel that there will also be much merit in examining the implementation of some of the standard-setting instruments in the field of culture, notably the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

2.2.5 We will also need to examine in earnest the current decentralization process, exercising our responsibilities in providing guidance to the Director-General as he continues his efforts to ensure that this process is effective, and duly governed by the rigours of accountability.

2.3 But arching over all of this work, as we turn a new page in our own history and are set to formulate the first Medium-Term Strategy for the third millennium, is the context of current UN reform and at the same time our obligation to understand and respond to the needs and realities of our constituent Members. I truly believe that we are uniquely placed to build on our transversal and interdisciplinary approaches in a results-based implementation of our Programme. This is the way forward in responding to the multi-layered challenges occurring today in an increasingly complex world. Endogenous solutions, taking into consideration an inherent understanding of the needs and aspirations of Member States, particularly proceeding from their own phase of development, must be proposed, however, in order to successfully develop and implement effective, results-oriented actions geared towards the achievement of our common goal – building peace in the minds of men. I am hopeful the discussions will also be able to demonstrate ways of translating these needs into local and regional actions that really take into consideration the actual phases of development of the Member States concerned. These, I feel, are the elements that should result in the successful formulation of the next C/4.

2.3.1 They will also feed directly into our careful consideration of the next Programme and Budget. The major challenge remains of securing an appropriate level of funding with which to achieve our agreed objectives and our commonly defined expected results, especially through the Regular Programme, which is the bedrock of our action, but also through extra-budgetary contributions.

2.4 In the organization of the work of this session, it has therefore been my major concern to allow us all to move in our reflections from the overarching and contextual to the
more specific. With this in mind, the General Debate, the Thematic Debate and the Debate on the coming Medium-Term Strategy and Programme and Budget are, in my opinion, key opening moments of this session, and I hope you will agree that we have granted these debates the amount of time they deserve. Given the likely impact of current UN reforms on UNESCO, and in consultation with the Bureau, you will see that the thematic debate, which is to take place pursuant to 169 EX/Decision 4.2, will be held on 4 October, after the General Debate and before that on the C/4 and C/5. I hope that in this way, it will provide food for thought in formulating our own opinions of the C/4 and C/5, and a close link between the exigencies of the broader UN reforms and the immediate needs of the C/4 and C/5. In order to make the thematic debate more interactive, and thought provoking and to enrich the discussions with Board Members, we have succeeded in inviting six speakers and two moderators, all of an extremely high calibre from different regions of the world, who have readily agreed, despite their busy schedules, to take an active part in the debate. These eminent persons will share with us their insights, their professional experience, and their forward-looking perspectives as they apply to our Organization and its fields of competence. I am sure it will enrich our thinking on the future strategies of UNESCO and keep our minds set on the higher objectives of our work at this session.

2.4.1 To best describe my sentiment, I should like to quote Confucius:人无远虑，必有近忧, which, this roughly translated, means “he who cannot look far enough ahead will suffer from the worries of the moment”.

2.4.2 During this session, our role is indeed to ensure that the guidance given by the General Conference at its last session on the mission, vision and role of the Organization in the coming six years is duly reflected in our emerging strategies, cognizant of the fact our future programmes will take us almost to the target dates for the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. It is strategic vision that this session thus demands of us, in order to provide a road map that allows for stability in the Organization’s endeavours and the creation of achievable goals. We must thus give broad guidelines and provide direction to the Director-General so that he and the Secretariat can elaborate on the full-fledged draft documents, 34C/4 and 34 C/5, to be considered at the next session of the Board. We should therefore avoid the temptation of too much attention to detail, but rather concentrate on the strategy that UNESCO must adopt in more effectively implementing its objectives and refining and fine tuning its role as a specialized agency within the broader UN family of organizations. Every journey begins with the first step. The first steps we take in the coming days will lead us through to our next session when we will be able to tackle the specifics of our future actions and activities. Thereafter our proposals will be forwarded to the General Conference for approval.

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3.1 Dear Colleagues, we should see ourselves as an orchestra. The work before us is a complex piece requiring all members of the orchestra to play their instruments to optimum performance. And in any orchestra there is a conductor. I must say how satisfied I am at the way the members of our Bureau have worked together, not just as a matter of formality, but as a true steering committee, discussing both thoughtfully and seriously how best to facilitate the Executive Board’s discussions. I can only thank them for their dedication.
Dear Colleagues, I am very much looking forward to the continued collaboration we have enjoyed since taking up our respective duties this biennium. During the coming days, I am counting on each and every one of you – indeed the wider UNESCO Membership is expecting us as the Executive Board of our Organization – to continue to build on this dynamic and indeed collectively strengthen the spirit of consensus building which is our long tradition and which represents the culture of our Organization. I am confident we will continue in this spirit of openness, mutual respect and understanding as well as dialogue.

With these thoughts in mind, Dear Colleagues, I do wish to thank you and say how happy I am to open the 175th session of the Executive Board of UNESCO.