

STATEMENT BY

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AT THE

**34TH SESSION OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE
UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND
CULTURAL ORGANISATION (UNESCO)**

17 OCTOBER 2007

Mr President of the General Conference

Mr Chairperson of the Executive Board

Mr Director-General

Excellencies

Distinguished Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

1. I am deeply honoured to be here today to address the 34th session of the General Conference of UNESCO. Please allow me to express my heartfelt appreciation to Mr Koichiro Matsuura, the Director-General of UNESCO, and the Members present here for the warm welcome that has been extended to Singapore.

SINGAPORE, A MEMBER OF UNESCO

2. The 34th session of the General Conference of UNESCO represents a significant milestone for Singapore. Today, after an absence of more than 20 years, Singapore is pleased to rejoin the UNESCO as a full member. We look forward to renewing old relationships and establishing new ones in the course of this session and beyond.

3. Singapore is committed to supporting UNESCO's goal of sustainable development, based upon the observance of human rights, mutual respect and the alleviation of poverty, through the promotion of

collaboration among nations in education, science and culture. Our objectives in these areas are aligned with those of UNESCO.

TOWARDS EDUCATION FOR ALL

4. Singapore supports UNESCO's initiatives and programmes in education, in particular the "*Education For All*" movement. Singapore shares the belief that education plays an important role in empowering individuals to realise their potential. When Singapore first attained self-government some forty years ago, we did not have enough schools. After a series of major education reforms and developments over the years, all Singaporean children today are given the opportunity to receive high quality education, regardless of their race, gender, family or social background.

5. Singapore regularly reviews its education system to maximise the potential of our children and prepare them well to meet the challenges of the increasingly globalised world. Having built a strong foundation in primary and secondary education, and significantly raised the participation in post-secondary and tertiary education, we have embarked on an exciting journey to create even more educational choices for our young. We are creating greater diversity and more education pathways, catering to different learning needs and styles, and nurturing students with different interests and talents. By injecting greater flexibility, we hope to develop many peaks of excellence in the education system over time.

6. We hope to share our experiences in education with fellow UNESCO members and to learn from your experiences too, as we all work towards providing quality education for our younger generation.

FOSTERING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

7. Singapore is also committed to the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, even as we engage and address modernity and transformation in a rapidly changing global environment. This is in line with one of UNESCO's overarching objectives to foster cultural diversity. Like UNESCO, we believe that the respect for cultural diversity underpins the foundation of cultural development.

8. On this front, Singapore has been leveraging on our culture and heritage as well as integrating contemporary arts and cultural developments to create a lively and enriching arts and cultural scene. One example is the 120-year-old National Museum of Singapore, which was re-opened last year after undergoing three years of refurbishment and reinvention. More than just a space for exhibitions and artefacts, the new National Museum is engaging the community in stimulating new ways. This includes using multimedia displays and vibrant festivals and events, to unleash new creative possibilities in culture and heritage. This is an example of how the old is merged with the new to open up fresh possibilities.

9. In addition, a growing appreciation and support for the arts is shaping Singapore into a Global City of the Arts. Major arts and culture festivals, such as the annual Singapore Arts Festival and the Singapore Biennale, serve as platforms to develop and showcase local and international talents. Singapore's very own art centre, Esplanade – Theatres on the Bay, has welcomed over seven million visitors and presented more than 1,800 local and international performances in the past year.

10. As we continue to enrich the arts and cultural scene in Singapore, we hope to contribute to strengthening the common cultural links across

Asia and the world. To this end, the Singapore Asian Civilisations Museum is holding an exhibition titled "On the Nalanda Trail: Buddhism in India, China and Southeast Asia" from November 2007. Held in conjunction with the 13th ASEAN Summit and 3rd East Asia Summit in Singapore and supported by loans from museums in India and Southeast Asia, the exhibition will cast fresh light on the rich history of the ancient Nalanda University, the seat of Buddhist and secular learning, and its impact on the region.

11. Singapore is committed to international cooperation in culture, and hopes to advance cross-cultural understanding and respect for diversity through various platforms, including UNESCO.

SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

12. Science and technology is an important part of global strategies to address environmental issues, such as climate change and sustainable access to safe drinking water. As a small island state with limited water resources, Singapore is acutely aware of the importance of diversifying our water supply to ensure sustainability. In addition to traditional methods such as developing water catchments and importing water, we have in recent years used technology to develop reclaimed water and desalinated water as part of our Four National Taps Strategy. We believe that the sharing of best practices and practical applications of water innovation and technologies can play an important role in solving water issues. The Singapore International Water Week to be held in June 2008 in Singapore serves as a valuable platform for government officials, industry leaders and water specialists to meet and discuss policies, business solutions and water technologies. We are also extremely encouraged by UNESCO's efforts and commitment in this area, including UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme, which is making

significant progress through its institutes and water education training packages.

CONCLUSION

13. In today's increasingly globalised world, countries around the world face many similar opportunities and challenges. There is great potential for sharing and learning among countries to benefit from each other's experiences and expertise. UNESCO, with its 193 member states, serves as a vital platform for the development of effective strategies to tackle global issues in pursuit of peace and human development for all mankind. Singapore is pleased to participate in this important and meaningful endeavour.

14. Thank You.