

**ANNEX VII****Address by Mr Eduard Zeman, Minister of Education of the Czech Republic,  
during the award of the Comenius Medal**

Mr Director-General,  
Distinguished Colleagues,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am personally very glad and honoured to take part again in such an important event, in the ceremony of awarding the Jan Amos Comenius Medal, joint medal of the Director-General of UNESCO and the Minister of Education, Youth and Sport of the Czech Republic, to five most deserving scholars and three pedagogical teams throughout the world, who substantially contributed to current development of pedagogical sciences in the whole world.

We live in a time of rapid and almost unpredictable social changes, which on a global scale necessarily influence the role and status of not only individuals and whole educational systems, but also your work as specialists in pedagogical sciences. Indeed, education is an immensely powerful instrument in the service of society, which could be utilized for the positive formation of the young generation. Nowadays, the mere development of learning skills and the cognitive capacity of individuals no longer suffices. Other qualities and values – spiritual, ethical and aesthetic – need to be acquired and a positive attitude to other people and to society as a whole should be developed. The educated nation, which has a constantly active approach to better and better education, has the only chance to survive on the side of the prosperous nations, in this economically split world. The only way how to cope with such a situation is systematic attention to educating all people, the care of education as such.

Education for partnership, cooperation and solidarity within the globalizing world has become one of the main targets of the National Programme of Development of Education in the Czech Republic. We seek to promote a concept of life without conflicts and negative attitudes not only within the national community but also with respect to other nations, linguistic groups, minorities and cultures. We wish to bring up generations of people, who will be able to accept and respect even considerable differences among peoples and cultures of today's interrelated world.

Your predecessor and colleague, Jan Amos Comenius, pedagogue, philosopher and humanist, whose medal you have been awarded today, was born more than 400 years ago on the territory of the contemporary Czech Republic. His importance exceeded the regional framework. His ideas and concepts had a fundamental influence on European as well as world pedagogical thinking and moved the development of education and training in society well ahead. Today, in our turbulent and divided world the ideas of Jan Amos Comenius about the necessity of bringing people close together for a happier life in the future are still appealing to us. Deep contrasts in the development of modern civilization have shaped the world as a place full of violence and misunderstanding. To seek solutions to these problems should be the main task for the generations which have entered the twenty-first century. The motto of the present 46th session of the International Conference on Education – “Learning to Live Together” – is proof that the world community in dealing with education is well aware of such issues and has no intention of ignoring them.

The awarding of the Jan Amos Comenius Medal is an important moment in particular for you, this year's laureates, who are directly involved here and now. The award of the Medal is in a very real sense public recognition, an award, which on the basis of democratic decision has been made by the jury and confirmed by the signatures of the Director-General of UNESCO and the Minister

of Education, Youth and Sport of the country which gave birth to one of the greatest teachers of all time – Jan Amos Comenius.

I would like to express my gratitude to all of you who have been presented today with the Comenius Medal for your lifelong commitment to education, for your professional work and for the permanent and devoted effort you have dedicated to raising the level of education as a whole all over the world. I am convinced that you will continue – as you have done hitherto – to bear your share of responsibility in such an irreplaceable activity for the benefit of the human race. I wish you full success in your work and in your personal life as well.

I am glad to use the opportunity of this ceremony to invite you personally, laureates of the Comenius Medal, to visit the Czech Republic and to have an opportunity to learn more about the life and work of Jan Amos Comenius, to get acquainted with the rich history and the pulsing reality of present-day life of this country in the heart of Europe. You will have a chance to know more about the Czech Republic and judge for yourselves how far the ideas of its famous citizen – pedagogue, philosopher and humanist Comenius – have come true.

I wish you, distinguished colleagues, as well as the whole world community, to devote your efforts, in cooperation with UNESCO and other international organizations, to safeguarding and strengthening the principal ideas of society – democracy, human rights and respect for man – and to contribute to the positive and dynamic overall development of man, which is primarily based on the level of general education combined with individual creative ability.

I am looking forward to welcoming you, distinguished laureates of the Comenius Medal, within a few days in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic.