

ANNEX XII**Closing speech by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General of UNESCO**

Mr. President,
Distinguished Ministers of Education,
Distinguished Heads of Delegations,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues and Friends,

The International Conference on Education, formerly the International Conference on Public Education, has a rich history and tradition. Over the years, it has addressed the leading educational issues of its time, bringing together the leading educational decision-makers of the world to do so. Certain issues and themes have recurred many times, including the dominant theme of this Session: leaning to live together. Other words and phrases have sometimes been used: for example, education for international solidarity, education for peace, education for tolerance and mutual understanding, and education for world citizenship. This year's Conference has approached this broad family of educational concerns with a distinctive orientation, namely, education for all. But echoes of earlier conferences have reverberated through our own, reminding us that the ICE is part of the whole world's educational heritage.

We have taken part in four days of hard work; it has been a rich learning experience for all of us. Sometimes we learn things that we want to know; sometimes we learn things that we do not want to know; and sometimes we learn things that we should know. I am sure that this Conference has provided opportunities for all three types of learning. And there is also a fourth type of learning: sometimes we need to learn things over and over again. As we do so, we come to recognize the wisdom and foresight of our predecessors who planted the seeds of a new education. Particularly in the aftermath of World War Two, that new education was based on an agreed perception that education must help us to strengthen our capacity to live together in peace. Fifty years from now, I hope that another generation will look back on our deliberations and admire our wisdom and foresight.

Educational change of various kinds has emerged as a common thread running through this Conference. I would like to draw attention to two important dimensions of educational change. First, changes to the contents and methods of education are long-term in character; they need time to develop and come to fruition. Second, such changes do not have a permanent, definitive, once-and-for-all character. In every generation, renewed efforts are necessary so that people may be educated in the values, attitudes and behaviour conducive to living peaceably with one another. Indeed, I have been impressed to learn at this conference of the large numbers of countries that are now embarked upon reforms of their education systems.

At the World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, Ministers of Education, international agencies, bilateral and multilateral development partners, and civil society organizations committed themselves not simply to education for all; they took another step forward, towards quality education for all. At this meeting of the ICE, we have taken another step by looking at how this improved quality might be built and what are the very real problems we face in doing so.

We know that sound educational policies for promoting quality education are indispensable. In view of the complex realities they must address, such policies should be formulated and implemented in close association with civil society, centres of educational research, and, most especially, teachers and parents. In the era of lifelong learning, we must reflect and act as learners ourselves. We cannot encourage children, youth and adults to continue learning while we ourselves remain rooted in outdated or unrealistic assumptions about who are the stakeholders and participants in educational policy-making.

A conference such as this provides an opportunity to learn about the changing world of learning. It is particularly important that educational policies are as well informed as possible, not only in terms of facts and statistics but also in regard to good practices, viable innovations and proven alternatives. We cannot take on new challenges in the emerging knowledge society if we are unaware of the range of policy options available and of the evidence and arguments that support them. We – the decision-makers responsible for fulfilling the commitments made in Dakar – must learn more about the processes of educational change and how they are affected by the realities outside the school gates.

In addressing the theme of learning to live together, this conference has been particularly clear about the risk of overloading the school with responsibilities it is not equipped to fulfil. The school obviously cannot solve all of society's problems, nor can it be insulated from those problems. Particularly important are experiences where new educational policies and practices have helped change the lives of people for the good, resulting in a significant decline in violence. We must learn from such experiences wherever they occur and draw out their implications: for example, they point us towards the decentralization of school systems and the embedding of schools in the community.

The Special Session on the involvement of civil society in EFA has allowed us to learn more about very important experiences of cooperation between the state, government institutions and other relevant actors. The new world of education is one where new partners are appearing on the scene, holding different views and pursuing different agendas. But there are always some dimensions of common concern and shared outlook. It is vital that, for a long-term task such as building quality basic education for all and developing viable approaches to learning to live together, the attempt is made to cultivate a sustainable consensus among all educational partners.

This ICE has been a great opportunity for me to learn, and not only from the formal sessions. I have especially benefited from the many bilateral meetings I have held. Such face-to-face meetings are most helpful for reaching a better understanding of your needs and problems. I have been delighted to hear many Ministers comment positively on how the ICE this year is better organized and better structured, and how it has offered more chances for genuine debate. I must say that the new modalities of running the Conference would not have succeeded without your cooperation, for which I thank you all. A number of Ministers have noted that they are addressing the same or very similar problems. This makes the identification and sharing of good practices especially important.

It will be both a duty and a pleasure to report the conclusions and outcomes of this ICE to the forthcoming 31st session of the UNESCO General Conference. The deliberations of this conference will be used to enrich the Organization's Medium-Term Strategy and, in particular, the way we undertake the fulfilment of our commitments made in Dakar. I will be asking the ADG/ED to look at ways of focusing UNESCO's work on such topics as languages, ICTs and school organization so that we may respond more precisely to the wishes you have expressed here.

I have already asked the IBE Council to begin working on the next ICE and the thematic concerns it should address. One possibility is that the next ICE will be devoted to deepening our knowledge and understanding of the education/poverty nexus, particularly in terms of how curriculum design and teaching/learning practices can be related meaningfully to the struggle against poverty in all its forms and dimensions. This agenda could include such questions as the relation between education and migration; the place of preventive education concerning HIV/AIDS in all types and levels of education; education and social exclusion, with particular attention to youth; and the curricular and pedagogical aspects of schooling that serves poor communities. The essential contributions of teachers and civil society will continue to figure centrally in our dialogue. In the time intervening until the next ICE, I am sure that we will have the chance to deepen and extend our knowledge and understanding of the relationship between poverty and education. Such a theme, by the way, would stay firmly within the framework of UNESCO's strategic orientation for the period ahead, namely, the humanization of globalization.

Many Ministers have expressed such satisfaction with the Conference that I am encouraged to see it held at more regular intervals. Perhaps the next ICE could be held in three years time, in 2004, or in four years time, in 2005. The ICE is clearly a major event for UNESCO, one which I hope will continue for many years to come.

The 46th Session of the International Conference on Education (ICE) has exceeded our expectations. It has been a great success. I would like to thank all those who have contributed to its preparation and organization, those who have contributed through their active presence, and those who have joined into the process of debate and dialogue with candid and forthright views. I recognize that the speaking opportunities for civil society organizations were quite limited, but I would like to assure you that your presence and involvement in the conference has been greatly appreciated.

My special thanks go to you, Mr President, for the way you have fulfilled your duties and tasks with such good-humoured firmness and understanding. I would also like to repeat my thanks to the Swiss Federal authorities and the authorities of the Republic and Canton of Geneva for the welcome and support they have given to this Conference and to the IBE.

The IBE Council, of course, has worked extraordinarily hard and we extend our deep thanks to its members and its Chairperson, Dr Pieter De Meijer. I would like to thank the professionals of UNESCO from the Education Sector, our regional and country offices, other parts of UNESCO, and the Dakar Follow-up Unit for all their contributions during this week. Further thanks are due to all those non-UNESCO staff who have helped to facilitate the Conference, with special mention to the interpreters.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to specifically thank the staff of the IBE who, under the energetic and capable leadership of their Director, have helped to make this conference a real success. Your dedication, hard work and sheer professionalism are much appreciated.

Learning how to live at peace with others is an indispensable part of all education. Let us all take this message away with us and apply it conscientiously to our work.

I wish you all a safe journey home.

Thank you.