

**ADDRESS BY MR NOUREINI TIDJANI-SERPOS  
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*On the occasion of the Preparatory Conference of the African region for the  
48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education (ICE),  
17 and 18 September 2008, Yaoundé – Cameroon*

**The Right Honourable Prime Minister of the Republic of Cameroon,  
Honourable Members of the Cameroon Government,  
Dear Ministers of Education,  
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Dear Colleagues of the United Nations System,  
The Director of the International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO),  
Dear Participants,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I have the pleasure to take the floor on behalf of Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO, to welcome you to the Preparatory Conference of the African region for the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the International Conference on Education, jointly organized by Cameroon and UNESCO, and which has as theme "Inclusive Education: Major Issues and Priorities in Africa".

I would like to first of all tell you why this regional conference is being held in Yaounde. It is due to the excellent cooperation between UNESCO and Cameroon, which spans over all the areas of competence of this Organization: education, science, social and human sciences, culture, communication and information. This cooperation has the blessings of the highest Cameroonian State authorities.

The visit of His Excellency the President of the Republic and his wife, Mrs Biya, on the occasion of the 34<sup>th</sup> session of the General Conference in October 2007 was an honour to UNESCO. Also, the presidential message I would like to quote with your permission encouraged UNESCO in its mission and activities "...in a changing world due to

globalization, the authority of UNESCO over its principal responsibilities has been sustained. This organization is still the guarantor of the principles of universality, justice, respect of Human Rights and tolerance, which are the key instruments in advancing dialogue between cultures".

**The Right Honourable Prime Minister,**

I would like to express my sincere thanks to you and to all the Cameroonian authorities for the warm welcome accorded to participants and for all your endeavours to ensure the success of this meeting, for your presence, Mr Prime Minister, at the opening ceremony of this regional forum which is a strong sign that education in Cameroon is a collective effort based on a well conceived vision of society following clear political and strategic guidelines, underpinned by a broad-based and meaningful partnership. In fact, education is a necessary investment in humankind and, according to the Dakar Forum in 2000, "Education is Everyone's Affair".

**The Right Honourable Prime Minister,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Inclusive education is of critical importance to UNESCO and is both a Human Rights affair and a process in which learning mechanisms are adapted to diverse learners. Let me attempt a definition of inclusion following the guiding principles of UNESCO. In the concept paper of inclusion "is a process that takes into account the diverse needs of all learners and meets them thanks to a growing participation in learning, cultures and communities, and curbs the practice of exclusion in education. It presumes the transformation and modification of contents, approaches, structures and strategies; with a common vision that includes all children of the age group concerned and the conviction that it is the responsibility of the public education system to educate all children". These are the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All objectives.

Consequently, this regional conference is of great importance in that it provides a forum for the countries in attendance to brainstorm, discuss, and exchange their views, and formulate recommendations likely to be useful in conceiving a common regional vision on the major issues and priorities of inclusive education in Africa, depending on each country's national policy. Such a vision will be shared by the world at large during the 48<sup>th</sup> International

Conference on Education scheduled for Geneva in November. It should provide a reference framework for open and in-depth discussions of key issues relating to inclusive education and help in raising awareness about this little known concept in Africa. For new approaches to be pooled together in Africa, the most successful experiences and practices in this area on the continent can be shared with all the participants.

By the time this conference winds up, participants will unavoidably have taken stock of education policies that take inclusion into account and will have brainstormed on pedagogic strategies appropriate to the advancement and implementation of this type of education in the African context. African countries will hence attend the Geneva Conference in closed ranks due to the common and shared vision likely to ensue from this preparatory conference.

In so doing, we are outlining broad-based principles to be used as reference in the implementation of the Second Education Decade in Africa (2006-2015) which, inter alia, states that perspectives based on Human Rights are the springboard of all political measures in education, and that in this regard, there is every reason to be sure of strong political support at the national, continental and world level, and to put emphasis on strategic issues whose implementation would make a difference within States and at regional level.

This Conference will surely be a booster to the process of African regional integration, which African Heads of State and Government consider of great importance, and in which UNESCO is participating through its partnership with the continent, its cooperation with the African Union and its NEPAD program, as well as with regional economic communities and regional integration organizations.

Also, I do not doubt that the proposals that will be submitted to the International Conference on Education in Geneva will be meaningful during reflection and debate sessions that will be held there.

How can inclusion be implemented in such a way as to build our young nations, while taking into account the gradual integration of the continent within the framework of sub-regional economic communities, with plans for a common school curriculum as takeoff point? How can young Africans be encouraged to have a common reference framework, shared values and to easily accept diversity? How can the education/culture interface be achieved for the African

school to truly mould young Africans who have an ethnic world view so that they can adopt a national and Pan-African vision?

As you can see, inclusive education in Africa does not concern only the excluded, school drop-outs, the disabled and marginalised. Inclusive education concerns us all and should help us to stop having an elitist vision of education and in building a democratic educational system which provides equal opportunity to all.

For these objectives to be achieved, it is important to mobilise political authorities and teachers, and the civil society in order to increase the means and thus launch a major project of new school curriculum development.

**The Right Honourable Prime Minister,**  
**Honourable Ministers,**  
**Dear Experts,**

These are some of the guidelines I wanted to give you in the hope that they will be followed during your brainstorming sessions on this topic whose strategic importance need not be over emphasised.

Thank you.