

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by  
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at the G8-UNESCO World Forum  
on 'Education, Research and Innovation:  
New Partnership for Sustainable Development'

*Session on Environment: Global Challenges*

Trieste, 10 May 2007

Excellencies,  
Distinguished participants,  
Ladies and Gentleman,

It is an honor and a pleasure to briefly address, in my capacity as Assistant Director-General for Natural Sciences at UNESCO, the G8-UNESCO World Forum on 'Education, Research and Innovation: New Partnership for Sustainable Development' and more specifically this session dealing with global challenges related to the environment.

My role is to say a few words that may help set the scene and allow the distinguished keynote speakers of the session to share with us their thoughts on this very complex, yet most relevant topic.

I will start by referring to what environment means in the context of the United Nations system and the close partner organizations of the UN.

A dominant theme in the discourse on the environment is that environmental action is too fragmented, that there are too many actors on the scene, that duplication is common, human and financial resources scarce and coordination and synergy-development limited. In UNESCO, we challenge this view and believe that environment is a multidimensional and crosscutting issue and, therefore, one that needs intervention by a wide variety of specialized actors at different levels.

A recent UNESCO study concerned with mapping environment-related activities within the UN system has demonstrated that environment in the context of the UN system and its close partners encompasses work in a very significant number of thematic and crosscutting areas. These include, but are not limited to: scientific and technological cooperation for the environment; natural resources management and governance; environmental policies; disasters, humanitarian assistance; poverty; trade; global climate change; health; pollution and contamination; energy; capacity-building; and financial assistance for the environment.

In the context of current actions carried out by the UN aimed at addressing all these various facets of the environmental problem, each organization brings different expertise and functions. It is therefore fortunate that the international community can rely on this wealth of expertise, made available through the work carried out by the UN system and its close partners to support the efforts of individual governments to tackle the many and varied issues concerning the environment.

The One UN approach advocated by the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment, the recommendations of which benefit from an increasing degree of consensus at the national and international levels, provides a most appropriate context for linking environment with development.

The global challenges related to the environment are many. They include: global environmental change, including climate change, the emergence of novel ecological properties, the biodiversity crisis and the altered functioning of ecosystems and the subsequent loss of ecosystem services that are crucial for ensuring human well-being and the well-being of other species. They further include environmental impacts of human action on public health; insecurity related to unequal access to the natural resource base of development, interlinkages between environment and poverty; and the lack of integrated science that addresses environmental crises and supports sustainable development.

In this context, research, education and innovation constitute a unique opportunity for strategic partnerships between all relevant sectors of society that aim at tackling global challenges related to the environment. However, in an intergovernmental context, such as the UN system, research, education and innovation cannot and must not follow a purely academic path. They must be based on systematic thinking and the best available scientific knowledge; they must also be anchored in a development context, with a specific emphasis on meeting the Millennium Development Goals.

In the specific case of UNESCO, its Intergovernmental Scientific Programmes in the areas of basic sciences, geosciences, ecological sciences, water sciences, oceans and climate provide platforms for experts, practitioners, decision-makers and policy experts to interact in a systematic manner and – jointly – develop the information basis, scenarios, and policy responses within which decisions can be taken by governments, with UNESCO's support and in the context of other UN and non-UN intergovernmental organizations and the Multilateral Environmental Agreements. In essence, UNESCO's Intergovernmental Scientific Programmes provide unique tools to develop an integrated approach for research, education and innovation to meet global environmental challenges.

It is only by recognizing the continued need to collect the best scientific information on the environmental issues with which society is confronted today, that the multi-stakeholder dialogue, necessary for the trade-offs on those issues, can be identified, by governments and by society. These trade-offs should aim at a better balance between environment, development and humanitarian assistance needs and basic social and human rights, and should also reflect the specific cultural contexts in which tailored solutions are implemented.

In this manner, UNESCO, the UN as a whole, other international governmental and non-governmental organizations, individual governments, the main economic sectors, civil society, regional groups and 'the North' and 'the South' will be conscious of the "common denominator" nature of environmental issues, in particular in relation to their effects on human development and to the effects of human development on the environment.

UNESCO, in line with its basic mandate to promote peace through the sciences, education, culture and communication, is ready to continue performing the role of a platform and forum for neutral, peaceful, constructive and forward-looking dialogue to

solve current and emerging environmental issues. In this regard, research, education and innovation constitute unique tools to craft responses and solutions to such environmental challenges.

In UNESCO's experience and view, the environment provides many opportunities for peace and development. UNESCO stands ready to work with the G8 Members in identifying practical ways to release the potential of the G8 to assist other countries and regions of the world to tackle environmental issues while meeting their aspirations and expectations concerning development.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am confident that this session's keynote speakers will be able to enlighten us about how research, education and innovation will assist us in meeting the tremendous challenge of new partnerships for sustainable development as we prepare to celebrate the International Year of Planet Earth in 2008.

Let me now introduce the speakers of this session:

- Professor Laura Marchetti, Under-Secretary of the Ministry of the Environment and Protection of Land and Sea, Italy;
- Mr Michael Osborne, Director of the International Futures Programme and the Global Science Forum Organisation for OECD;
- Lord Julian Hunt of Chesterton, Professor of Climate Modeling and former Director-General and Chief Executive of the Meteorological Office, UK; and
- Mr Giuseppe Morsillo, Head of the Director General's Policy Office, European Space Agency.

I thank you for your attention.