

**UNESCO Ministerial Roundtable on
“Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development: The Role of UNESCO”
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Remarks**

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I am pleased to speak in this forum more than two years following the previous UNESCO Ministerial Roundtable in June 2005. Since that time, science and technology have continued to advance at a rapid pace, and that is a good thing because the challenges of our increasingly global societies have been advancing too. I believe we can meet these challenges only through vigorous and responsible application of knowledge gained through the methods of science and applied through the ingenuity of men and women in every society.

Many of the challenges we face grow from the natural desire of people everywhere to improve the quality of their lives, and not only for themselves during their own lifetimes, but for their children and all future generations. Life-quality depends on access to adequate housing, food, water, health-care, education, and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the welfare of our societies. As simple as these requirements may seem, they imply a technical infrastructure that does not exist today. To name only a single example, but one of the most important ones, the global status of our technology for generating and using energy is simply not sustainable. Even if traditional energy technologies were environmentally benign, which for the most part they are not, they are currently not deployed adequately in much of the developing world. Efforts to secure energy supplies to sustain even the current pace of development are already leading to international tensions that will only grow in the absence of innovations that can change the world’s energy picture. No one, however, can be satisfied with innovations that work for a single lifetime, or even a few generations. We must find ways to satisfy the aspirations of the future, and not only of the present. Not innovation only, but sustainable innovations, are required to achieve this vision.

The concept of sustainability of course includes sustainable social infrastructures, which in turn require viable systems of government and education. The physical infrastructures of energy and agriculture, water and transportation, housing and health care, must be established and improved together with the social infrastructures. They go hand in hand. And how to achieve this complex interdisciplinary development depends very much on existing social and physical conditions in each country and each region of the world. Therefore I was much encouraged when two years ago in this forum the science ministers of more than 120 assembled nations found common themes for action – more than two dozen of them – upon which all agreed in the summarizing communiqué from that meeting.

When I read that communiqué again in preparation for today’s Roundtable, I was impressed by how relevant the themes remain – you might say the themes are themselves sustainable! And this assembly could do worse than reaffirm them. I am eager to hear of

accomplishments and progress toward the grand objectives we summarized two years ago. But we are gathered here not only to share news of our own progress, but also to guide the organization – UNESCO – through which we hope to foster them and to help each other along the way.

The 2005 Communiqué presented its positions under five sections: *General Context*, *Education in Science*, *Capacity Building*, *Cooperation*, and the *Role of UNESCO*. The General section affirmed the primary role of basic science in the “pursuit of knowledge that leads to the improvement of the human condition, the pursuit of sustainable development and, in general, the advancement of civilization.” It acknowledged the need for new scientific knowledge to meet new challenges, identified basic science as the “stable foundation” for technologies, and emphasized that scientific knowledge is the common heritage of all humankind. We agreed that ethics is essential in the practice of science, and that governmental decision-making should take science into account. The remaining sections are more specific but no less timely. They express themes and priorities that have been stated and discussed in many other forums. I will remind you only that they emphasize the importance of science education as indispensable to capacity building, of the strong link between education and research, of the need to link research as well as education to local needs, and of the exceptional power of partnerships, collaborations, and cooperation among countries.

What is important about this particular forum is its unique relationship to UNESCO, the organization our countries support to assist us in carrying forward our visions for science, education, and sustainable development. Consequently the last section of the 2005 Communiqué has special significance. In that section we, the official representatives of the branches of our governments particularly concerned with the execution of science and technology policy, called upon UNESCO to consider 12 points, of which the first was “to place greater emphasis on promoting the basic sciences and science education with a view to the attainment of a science culture as a precursor of a knowledge-based society worldwide, through various means available at UNESCO.” Nearly half of the remaining points dealt with education. Other points emphasized UNESCO’s role in assistance in planning and strengthening science programs, promoting the mobility of teachers and researchers among countries, and fostering partnership and coordination across the UN system.

I can catch glimpses of these themes in the planning and budgeting material produced during the past year by UNESCO staff, but it is not easy to trace the influence of our work in the final results. Perhaps this is an issue we can discuss during the session on “guidelines for UNESCO action” tomorrow. As I see it, however, one of the “inherited challenges” relevant to this morning’s topic is UNESCO itself, and we need the strongest possible UNESCO to help us address our other emerging and legacy issues.

Compared to the global scale and scope of issues that fall within its purview, UNESCO has very limited resources to achieve our objectives. And judging from my own experience it is tempting under such circumstances to attempt to satisfy all demands, which usually ends in satisfying none of them. Therefore I strongly endorse recommendations made by UNESCO’s Overall Review Committee on Science to establish a Science Advisory Committee that would provide external perspective and accountability for the science programs, especially as regards

their focus on guidance achieved by a consensus of the key stakeholders such as the communities of Ministers that participate in these Roundtables. (The establishment of an external advisory committee is Recommendation 9 in the Committee's Report). Director General Matsuura certainly does not need more outsiders telling him what to do, but, especially in matters of science, the tradition of external advisory bodies has proven to be useful in maintaining focus on priorities and quality in operations. Therefore I hope the current arrangement of an internal Task Force addressing these issues will evolve quickly to include a strong external component representative of the expertise we rely on to guarantee the quality of our own Ministerial decisions.

I wish to thank Director General Matsuura for arranging the program for our Roundtable to include not only the very valuable exchanges of information about our own science and education initiatives, but also to encourage discussion of means by which UNESCO can be more effective and responsive to the needs of its stakeholders. In conclusion, let me say that I learned a great deal from presentations at the previous Roundtable, and look forward to a similarly rewarding experience during these next two days.

Thank you.