



## UNITED STATES MISSION TO UNESCO

**Statement by the Representative of the United States of America  
181<sup>st</sup> Session of the Executive Board of UNESCO  
April 21, 2009**

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is an honor to address you today, at a time of transition both for my country – and for this organization.

Judging by my discussions with many of you, I doubt any one is unaware that less than 100 days ago, the United States inaugurated a new president and embarked on a new Administration. My countrymen and I are most grateful for the best wishes that many of you have so freely extended to us at this important moment in the political life of my country.

We here at UNESCO are also collectively facing our own historic moment in the evolution of this Organization, as we too prepare to embark on a fresh start. President Obama and his team have already indicated in multiple ways a desire to work constructively with the nations and peoples of this world, including with international organizations. As our Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Ambassador Susan Rice, recently said, “President Obama's view is clear, that our security and well-being can best be advanced in cooperation and in partnership with other nations. And there is no more important forum for that effective cooperation than the United Nations.”

The United States stands ready to work collaboratively with UNESCO. This Organization works on a number of high priority areas for the U.S.

One is education, which will continue to be just as important to the Obama Administration as it was to its predecessor. We are very pleased that UNESCO's Thematic Debate at this Board will at last focus on Education for All. We are also very interested in and pleased by UNESCO's recent efforts to expand its ability to help states which have recently suffered conflicts or national disasters to put their educational systems back together.

Science is also important. President Obama said in his inaugural address that he intended to put science back in its rightful place. He meant it. The United States already works closely with the Inter-governmental Oceanographic Commission, and we plan to step up our cooperation on freshwater issues by establishing a Category 2 Institute that we hope will be considered at the 182<sup>nd</sup> session of this Board. We will continue to look for new areas of cooperation with UNESCO on scientific issues where it has capabilities and a clear mandate.

In culture, we will continue to give strong support to World Heritage which we believe should focus on its original purpose, the preservation of heritage of outstanding universal value.

Finally, and of equal importance, we will support UNESCO's efforts to protect freedom of expression and to make information freely available to all who need it. We will continue to back the International Program for the Development of Communication (IPDC) and to support practical steps to facilitate multi-lingual content on the internet. As many of you are probably aware, the World Digital Library will "go live" this evening in an event on the Seventh Floor of this building in just a few minutes. This project joins the U.S. Library of Congress in partnership with the national libraries and cultural institutions of 20 other countries, and will facilitate in a low-cost, practical way multi-lingual document searches in scripts as different as Cyrillic, Arabic, Korean, Chinese, and Japanese.

Practicality -- not ideology -- will be the determining factor in how we work with UNESCO. The key question will be "Can UNESCO get the job done and do so in a cost-effective way?"

After reading the draft program and budget for the next biennium, my government is not certain it has a clear answer to this last question. UNESCO has attempted to improve its reporting on results and the goals it has set for itself, but it is still a challenge to read UNESCO's documents and obtain a clear picture of what this organization does or intends to do. UNESCO's administrative costs are relatively high. While some of the additional money being requested in this budget is intended for programs, much would go for increased administrative expenses, including many new positions in headquarters. We learned in the Financial Experts Group a few days ago that we may receive important new information on this Organization's security costs over the summer. For now, my government does not believe the case for additional money has been made, and it seems to us better to postpone a decision on the budget ceiling until the next Board session.

In the meantime, it is important to keep working to improve UNESCO management while also exercising restraint, as Member States, in seeking to place even more demands upon UNESCO's already burdened shoulders. Continued management reform will be as much of a concern to the Obama Administration as it was to its predecessor. This Organization cannot command the material and intangible support of Member States without it.

We are deeply appreciative of Mr. Matsuura's record of managerial accomplishments and his on-going efforts in this regard. We owe him our dedicated help and support right down to the expiration of his term.

This raises the issue of the other transition that faces us, the election of the next Director-General later this year. At this Board, we will consider once again the rules that will guide the selection process. My delegation will listen with an open mind to the suggestions of others. It is important to get this right. The rules must be clear and fair for all.

The choice of the next Director-General is the most important decision we will face for many years. Sixty years after its founding, the basic reasons for having UNESCO remain as strong as ever. Members of the world community need to cooperate with each other on education, science, culture, and communications. Now, more than ever, we need to tear down these mental barriers and suspicions that keep us apart.

While it may be too early to talk of names – the deadline for submitting candidacies is not until May 31 – it is not too early to begin thinking seriously about the qualities we seek in the next Director-General.

To some extent, we have already begun. In the text of the letter agreed at our last Board we said we were looking for someone with management skills, a strong commitment to the objectives of the Organization, a good knowledge of the UN system, and high moral and ethical standards. Most importantly, we said we wanted someone who could display leadership and a visionary approach. All of these qualities are important, but perhaps none more than the sense of vision. UNESCO urgently needs to look forward into the coming century and to keep reinventing itself to meet the needs of all of its members.

In 1946, international travel was rare and time consuming; long-distance communication was limited, and knowledge did not flow freely and easily across borders. At that time this Organization had a very clear role in efforts to spread education and scientific knowledge to all who needed it. Advances in communications technology over the past 60 years, however, have changed the world's needs. What UNESCO does, how we do it, and our capacity to lead on its core issues must meet the contemporary needs of the international community. Otherwise, we risk being marginalized. We cannot risk that, neither for ourselves nor for those we serve.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your attention.