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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
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Address by
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of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the award of an honorary doctoral degree by the University of
London Institute of Education

London, 18 March 2003

Mr Vice Chancellor,
Distinguished Members of the Senate,
Distinguished Colleagues and Guests,
Fellow Graduates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today and a great personal honour. I am very proud to receive this award of an honorary doctorate, which has added significance in the context of the centenary celebrations of the Institute of Education. In cricketing terms, you are 100 not out and still batting strong, and long may you continue to do so.

I would like immediately to thank Professor Zellick, Vice Chancellor of the University of London, for the high honour he has bestowed upon me. I am delighted to receive this award and will treasure it always.

I would also like to thank Professor Aldrich for his oration. I do think modesty is an important human virtue, therefore receiving a eulogy is a real test of character. I thank you sincerely for your kind and thoughtful words.

I would also like to express my appreciation of Professor Hans Hoxter, who nominated me for this degree but who, unfortunately, died late last year. He was a fine man, an excellent scholar and a passionate believer in UNESCO, its ideals and its mission. I salute his memory and his remarkable achievements over a long lifetime.

My congratulations go to my fellow graduates, for whom this rite of passage is, I am sure, full of meaning in terms of your personal, academic and career development and important also for your families, friends, mentors and colleagues. I am proud to be with you and one of you on this special day.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Professor Aldrich has noted, since becoming Director-General of UNESCO, I have worked to reform and revitalize the Organization, especially by concentrating the Organization's relatively limited resources on what is most important and where UNESCO's role is particularly vital. Our great risk is to be spread too thinly across our five fields of competence – education; culture; the natural sciences; the social and human sciences; and communication and information. Within each field, therefore, I have selected a principal priority - in the natural sciences, for example, it is 'freshwater and related ecosystems'. In

the social and human sciences, our main emphasis is upon the ethics of science and technology, especially bioethics.

For education, the principal priority is Education for All (EFA) and I have made this the jewel in the crown of all the principal priorities. Basic education is clearly related to other types and levels of education – secondary, technical and vocational, and higher education – and its importance today rests on the fact that it is foundational for all the others.

I would like now to share with you our vision for quality education, which is one of the Education for All goals and perhaps the most profound in relation to the purposes of education and the roles of teachers and others responsible for education.

Some might say that EFA, which is part of the unfinished business of the 20th century, is not really an issue of quality but a quantitative challenge – a matter of numbers, access, enrolment ratios. But this is far from the case. At the landmark World Education Forum held in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, the international community made the commitment to achieve six key EFA goals. Five are amenable to quantitative measurement, with three of those (relating to universal primary education, gender equality, and literacy) being given specific targets and deadlines. Just one goal, the sixth, is focused on *improving all aspects of the quality of education*, but it is indispensable for all the others. The EFA drive is about ensuring the completion of a basic education *of good quality* by everyone, everywhere.

A statement from the *Dakar Framework for Action* sums up for me what the EFA challenge is all about: “all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. It is an education geared to tapping each individual’s talents and potential, and developing learners’ personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies.” These fine words encapsulate what the quality of education is about too, and remind us what the great endeavour of education is for.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO’s vision of quality education encompasses three main dimensions – the conceptual, the strategic and the practical – which I shall now address in turn. **In conceptual terms**, the foundation of quality education rests on the right to education being available to all – an education based on exclusion, discrimination and injustice cannot be an education of quality.

UNESCO promotes quality education as a human right and supports a rights-based approach to the implementation of all educational activities.

Furthermore, quality is conceptually linked to a vision of education that is integral, comprehensive and dynamic. Since UNESCO's mandate for education is all-embracing, it is essential that we conceive of education holistically and systematically - the better to see how the parts fit together and interact with each other; the better to see how the full development of the person cannot be conceived separately from the full development of society and, in this era of accelerating globalization, of humanity in its entirety.

However, there has never been a time when the unity of humankind has been more palpable and yet more vulnerable. For this reason, we must re-work our vision of education to take account of our diversity and particularity while also re-affirming the universal values that hold us together. For UNESCO, questions of quality are central to the task of understanding, articulating and developing a holistic vision of education appropriate for this new century.

If I now look at the quality of education **in strategic terms**, I am immediately struck by how many factors are involved, how complex are their interactions and how rich and diverse is the debate on quality. For its part, UNESCO needs to keep all major elements of quality education in view but it cannot hope to do full justice itself to each dimension. Therefore, we must choose and set priorities, focusing on those dimensions for which we have some distinctive capacity or strong affinity and to which we can provide "added value" that will improve the more general picture. We are placing our strongest focus on four areas we believe are crucial for improving the quality of education in the period ahead: education for sustainable development; education for peace and human rights; the revision of curricular and learning materials; and teacher education.

In practical terms, the quality of education requires attention to be paid to many interlocking factors: the learners' capacities and needs; educational content, which needs to be updated and adapted to take account of innovation, change and new knowledge; the processes of teaching and learning; and the learning environment in terms of not only its physical features but also its psycho-social characteristics – especially with a view to eliminating gender discrimination, bullying, corporal punishment, and forced work. Finally, there is the question of "quality outcomes", understood in terms of defined learning outcomes (knowledge, attitudes and skills) and suitable ways to assess them at classroom and national levels. Quality education can be measured but the ways of doing so can themselves be improved and diversified.

Again, practical action requires choices and priorities, especially regarding the “entry points” appropriate to a particular learning situation and context. UNESCO has already identified many such entry points in relation to textbooks and teachers. The important thing to recognize, which is especially relevant for poor communities or developing countries, is that every learning environment can be improved with small changes on a regular and sustained basis. Furthermore, quality improvement does not automatically require immediate and large increases in financial resources. Small changes in poorly resourced learning environments can bring real improvements. Sometimes, large investments of financial and material resources are needed, of course, but not for every problem or circumstance.

UNESCO’s vision of quality education, which is still ‘in the making’, addresses all three dimensions I have just outlined. It is a vision strongly grounded upon human rights and an understanding of universal human values. It is not education *about* human rights but education *for* human rights. It recognizes the cultural and historical roots of learning as well as the need to engage with the fast-changing realities of the 21st century. It is a holistic and unifying vision but in no way a recipe for uniformity. It is, I believe, a vision well suited to our times.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In concluding my remarks, I would like to congratulate the Institute of Education once again on reaching its one hundredth anniversary. Though born of different times and circumstances, ours are kindred institutions, dedicated to the same ideals, principles and values. We share a fundamental belief in education as a powerful force for good on this Earth. Let us long maintain and, indeed, strengthen the cooperation between our institutions.

I would also like to encourage the students graduating today to give further thought to what the quality of education means in the 21st century. Whether as teachers, headteachers, administrators, researchers or in some other educational role, the question of quality in education is certain to figure prominently and recurrently in your professional lives.

Finally, let me express once again my great appreciation of the honorary degree bestowed upon me. It is a signal honour and I am deeply grateful.

Thank you.