



Remarks By

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At
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"Youth and Children"

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Mr. Chairman,
Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ecuador,
Distinguished Members of the Permanent Forum,
Fellow Panelists,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Afternoon.

Mr. Chairman,

I am invited to make some remarks on UNESCO'S approach to Education as it relates to the Indigenous Peoples. However, before embarking on the subject, allow me to situate the issue of Indigenous Peoples in UNESCO's policy and Programme. I am sure that my Director-General Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, who personally takes the issue seriously, would not take it kindly if I didn't.

In UNESCO, Indigenous Peoples as a theme is a cross cutting one in the various spheres and components of the Organization, particularly in the major sectors of Culture, Social and Human Sciences and Education. But in the first place, the attention paid to Indigenous Peoples is a matter of upholding Human Rights, which is one of UNESCO's major platforms.

Secondly, it is a matter of preserving, respecting, and eventually taking full advantage of the Cultural Heritage of Humanity: This is as it relates to language, socio-cultural practices, art, the folklore, traditional medicine, sport, etc.

Another area which brings the Indigenous Peoples into focus within UNESCO Programme and action is the advocacy for Cultural Diversity and Multilingualism: as opposed to a monolingual, monocultural, globalised approach to development.

Various spheres can be added to the above and concrete examples of UNESCO's action can be further discussed and returned to later. However, it is time to focus on Education.

Mr. Chairman, here the first point to be made, as Chief Sidney Heel said earlier this morning and as you yourself Mr. Chairman lamented in your opening remarks, is that there is a general recognition that Indigenous Peoples have long been neglected within national policies and programmes, especially with regard to Education.

This, therefore justifies the fact that Education is one of the major objectives of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples (1995-2004), whereby the UN General Assembly adopted a Programme of activities stating: ***"the main objective of the Decade is the Strengthening of the International Cooperation for the solution of problems faced by the Indigenous Peoples in such areas as human rights, the environment, health, Culture and Education."***

Effectively, UNESCO focuses on the Education of Indigenous Peoples, not for its own sake or in isolation. No, we are aware that the subject is intimately connected with issues of poverty, democracy, human rights, etc and hence of interest within a wider socio-economic context.

In the recent past, UNESCO's action has been galvanized by the Education for All drive, starting with the World Conference in Jomtien, 1990, followed by the Dakar Framework for Action, established in 2000 and for which the Organization is a Lead Agency along with other UN Agency partners, namely UNICEF, UNFPA and the World Bank. That framework states: ***"Education for All.... must take into account the needs of the poor and most disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers, nomads, ethnic and linguistic minorities.... and those with special learning needs."***

Furthermore, the Education for All Drive has again been reinforced within the Millennium Development Goals, which have set concrete targets for Girls' Education and Literacy. Here, reference should also be made to the UN Literacy Decade (2003-2012), which emphasizes an inclusive approach in terms of target groups, action frameworks, methodologies and partnerships. For UNESCO, attention to Indigenous Peoples is also a way of expanding and strengthening partnerships for universal education. In accordance with those basic principles, the Organization has adopted key guidelines relating to:

- **Mother tongue instruction** (starting from the advocacy geared through frameworks such as International Mother Language Day, 21 February, or, the ongoing work regarding the Oral of Intangible Heritage)
- **Bi-lingual or multilingual education**
- **Intercultural education**

In more concrete terms, UNESCO has recently worked on two major publications of direct interest to Indigenous Education:

- A Position Paper entitled ***"Education in a Multi-lingual World"***. (In that connection, it can be recalled that UNESCO's 1953 Publication: ***"The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education"*** has remained as a popular reference material over the years).
- A Working Document entitled: ***"Good Practice in Quality Education for Indigenous Peoples"*** (- still in draft form).

In conclusion, allow me to quote some measures of Good Practice in Indigenous Education, drawn from the document above and which need to be taken at the national level.

These include:

- Legislation and policies which ensure the enjoyment by indigenous peoples of the right to quality education;
- Free primary education of good quality;
- Equal access to quality education for indigenous peoples so that they can acquire the same level of education as other citizens;
- Equal provision of quality education for all indigenous peoples, including those living in remote areas;
- Provision of adequate financial resources, including for the establishment of indigenous people's own educational institutions and facilities.

Mr. Chairman,

Listening to the Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ecuador, we are encouraged to note that some countries are effectively taking some of those measures mentioned above with a view to finding solutions to some of the Indigenous People's problems.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I must refer the Forum to Document E/C.19/2003/CRP.3: "UNESCO Activities regarding Indigenous Peoples Issues – Culture and Education", which has been distributed as one of the Session's working documents.

In addition, I wish to report that two UNESCO Colleagues, Specialists on Indigenous Issues from the Education and Culture Sector at Headquarters in Paris will be arriving by the end to attend this Session. They will be able to deal more adequately with questions or points, which I may not be able to handle at my general and generalist level.

Thank you for your attention and I wish the Forum fruitful deliberations.