

Second African Ministerial conference on science

Dakar 27-30 September 2005

Speech by J.G.M. Massaquoi

NEPAD and UNESCO

*Your Excellency, The president of the republic of Senegal,
President Abdoulaye Wade*

Honorable Ministers

Members of the diplomatic Corps

Distinguished ladies and gentlemen

I bring you the greetings and well wishes of the Director –General of UNESCO (Mr. Koichiro Matsuura). At a gathering like this it is the tradition of UNESCO to make a statement regarding its collaboration and its future commitment to the implementation of the NEPAD programme of activities. I will therefore use this opportunity to say a few words about UNESCO collaboration with NEPAD in the promotion of Science and Technology in the Region. The organisation has fully embraced the NEPAD Science programme and has incorporated some the objectives of NEPAD into the UNESCO workplan for the natural sciences both at the regional level and the headquarters in Paris.

Some of the participants will recall that UNESCO was very active in the organization of the first African ministerial conference on Science. Immediately after the decision was taken to hold the ministerial meeting, UNESCO offered to organize and host a Preparatory workshop to develop the documents which were to be discussed at the ministerial conference later in that year. The preparatory workshop was held in Nairobi, from 13-15 October 2003 and hosted by the UNESCO regional bureau for science in Africa.

The meeting brought together experts from all the geographic sub-regions of the continent to develop an action plan and draft a document that was to be submitted to the ministerial conference. Participants in the meeting deliberated on various problems facing the region and the constraints on the use of science and technology in addressing those problems. From their discussions they were able to identify flagship programmes which were to be given priority in the promotion of science and technology in the region.

The documents prepared by the UNESCO-sponsored preparatory workshop were later that year presented to African ministers at the first NEPAD Ministerial conference on Science which was held in Johannesburg in November 2003. That meeting was also strongly supported by UNESCO. The organization collaborated with the NEPAD secretariat and sent a team of resource persons who helped to make the conference very successful. The conference adopted the action plan and a governance structure of the NEPAD science programme was established.

Our contribution to, and collaboration with NEPAD in the field of science had gone beyond the preparation and organization of high-level meetings. Since 2004, UNESCO has used the NEPAD action plan as one of the basis for the formulation of its programme

activities in science both for its regular programme and also for its extra-budgetary projects.

Your excellency, Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I shall now highlight just two examples of the collaboration.

One of the major objectives of the NEPAD action Plan is to promote networks of centers of excellence in key areas of science and technology. UNESCO, through its Nairobi office is involved in the development of centers of excellence in water science. The organization together with UNEP (The UN agency responsible for the Environment) and the NEPAD secretariat for science have already met in Nairobi to determine the methodology for identifying centers of excellence; the mechanism for networking the centers and the possible of sources of funding for such a network in water science.

Another objective of the NEPAD action plan is the human resource capacity building in relevant areas of science and technology. The Ministers at their meeting in Johannesburg considered it extremely important for the region to generate a large pool of manpower capable of using science and technology for socio-economic development.

In pursuance of this objective and in recognition of the fact that capacity building in science and technology takes place mainly in universities and other tertiary institutions, the UNESCO Nairobi office has embarked on a project with the goal to strengthen African Science and technology training institutions.

As a first step in this direction, UNESCO is convening the first African Regional Conference of Vice-chancellors, Rectors, Deans of science and Engineering and Technology. This conference,

which will be held in Accra, Ghana in November 2005, will deliberate on all problems confronting Science and technology training institutions and propose an action plan for their revitalization.

UNESCO is expecting a large gathering of University leaders responsible for Science and technology training in the region. It will be an opportunity to consult them and involve them in the development of any revitalisation plan. At least 200 Vice-chancellors and Deans from all over Africa will attend the meeting. The recommendations and the proposed action plan from the meeting will be shared with the NEPAD and other partners. They could form a basis for identification of centers of excellence or other intervention programmes for human resource capacity building.

Finally, I wish to state that UNESCO is fully committed to NEPAD and all its programme activities that fall within the organization's mandate have been embraced. It is in this connection that the organization has established a special committee (the UNESCO Committee for NEPAD) to steer the organization's cooperation with NEPAD. This committee which is chaired by the Director-General himself and comprising of representative of various African countries meets regularly to review the contribution of UNESCO to NEPAD workplan in all areas under UNESCO mandate.

I have highlighted the various initiatives only to illustrate the level of collaboration that NEPAD enjoys with UNESCO. During the course of the week the UNESCO assistant director-General responsible for natural science (Mr. Walter Erdelen) will arrive here. He will give you more details of our programme commitments and future collaboration with NEPAD. At this stage

I will thank all of you for your attention and wish you a very productive engagement in this conference.