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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 Conference
“ICT for Capacity-Building: Critical Success Factors”

UNESCO, 11 May 2005

Mr Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania,
Mr Karklins, President of the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the
Information Society,
Mr Weiler, President of the Brussels/European Union Chapter of the Club of Rome,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to open this World Summit Thematic Meeting on “ICT for Capacity-Building: Critical Success Factors”. I would like to welcome all of you to what promises to be a most interesting event.

This Conference is one of many ways that UNESCO is engaging in the ongoing process of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). I am delighted that UNESCO, through technology, is bringing together such a range of international stakeholders and experts to help UNESCO and its partners in our combined efforts to translate the vision of the World Summit into action. We share a very strong resolve, illustrated by the Declaration from the first phase of the WSIS in Geneva in December 2003, where it says in Principle 14: “We are resolute to empower the poor, particularly those living in remote, rural and marginalized urban areas, to access information and to use ICT (Information and Communication Technology) as a tool to support their efforts to lift themselves out of poverty”.

This is a very special event, reflecting the spirit of the World Summit in that it is truly multi-stakeholder. In organizing this conference, UNESCO has partnered with the Club of Rome, and I wish to acknowledge and thank it for its efforts. In keeping with the recognition by the United Nations and the Summit of the need for new forms of solidarity, partnership and cooperation to address the digital divide, a wide range of experts from civil society worldwide will be involved in this Conference. This includes NGOs, academia, industry and colleagues from other international agencies, all of whom are working on policies, partnerships and technology solutions to build human capacity and accelerate development through the use of ICT.

Over the next three days, we will share ideas, experiences and know-how with a global and diverse audience through a unique feature of this event, namely, the live discussion platform. Four regional interactive sessions are scheduled to collect live testimonies from 12 locations in Latin America, the Arab States, Africa and Asia. UNESCO greatly appreciates the support of the World Bank Institute which has made available the satellite facilities of the Global Development Learning Network for this Conference.

Our objective with this global dialogue is to address the key challenge of how to develop the human capacities necessary for building inclusive knowledge societies. Over the past decade, ICT has triggered a revolution, affecting education, culture,

society and many other spheres of our lives, and this revolution is only just beginning. Access to information and knowledge facilitated by ICT is increasingly determining patterns of learning, cultural expression and social participation. It also provides opportunities for development, more effective poverty reduction and the preservation of peace. Indeed, knowledge is playing, and will continue to play, a pivotal role as a principal force of social transformation.

Knowledge societies depend on the capacity of people to use and apply ICT to facilitate access to knowledge acquisition, transfer and learning. Knowledge societies are societies in which new paradigms of learning are emerging and exceptional investment, both intellectual and financial, in new learning will be needed. Knowledge societies are necessarily societies with strong learning imperatives and quality education for all is one of the building blocks of knowledge societies.

To put it very simply, we are striving for a world of social inclusion without the daily grind of poverty. We know that knowledge, through education and learning, is the key to improving prosperity and human security. This was one of the core messages that UNESCO took to the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva 2003. For some years now, there has been enormous global investment in the use of ICT as a means of addressing critical development needs. This reflects what was acknowledged globally through the World Summit, that the appropriate use of technology can greatly accelerate social and economic development.

The Declaration of Principles from the Summit places great emphasis on capacity-building and in particular makes the link between sustainable development and the potential of using ICT in all stages of education, training, and human resource development. Now, through the Summit Plan of Action, all stakeholders are being called upon to focus and accelerate their efforts to build the necessary capacities to bridge the digital divide and to ensure everyone can benefit fully from the Information Society.

This brings us to the key question of this Conference. How effective and sustainable is the strategy of using ICT for capacity-building? What needs to happen to ensure that the growing investment in ICT to support learning can play its part in realizing the aims of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and fulfil the responsibilities under the World Summit Plan of Action?

Over the next three days, therefore, this Conference will draw on experiences and expertise from around the world on how ICT is being used to develop human capacities. To complement UNESCO's other efforts on education for sustainable development, we have decided to reflect the emphasis of civil society at the World Summit and to pay particular attention to the marginalized and vulnerable, and those not easily reached by classical education methods.

As a process of progressive change from ignorance to knowledge, from inability to competence, and from indifference to understanding, learning has never been so crucial. The need for lifelong learning and for education that is accessible, affordable and of high quality presents a huge challenge. As this learning process becomes increasingly complex and non-linear, going far beyond the acquisition of basic literacy skills, old methods of learning are becoming insufficient and conventional methods of limiting the learning process to the four walls of a classroom and a one-time learning experience become less relevant and efficient.

New ways of teaching and learning may now be envisaged where ICT makes it possible for creating learning communities across age, class and status, language, skill, gender and spatial boundaries. ICT can change the modes of learning as it provides open and flexible solutions and can be highly cost effective and efficient in terms of reach and impact. This, let me add, does not mean that we can do without schools. But we need to combine traditional and new methods.

In focusing on non-formal education and on the use of ICT for learning, we need to understand the critical success factors of the projects and policies designed to build human capacities. Our challenge is to identify what works and what does not. Given the complexity of learning environments and of applying ICT for development policies, programmes and projects, this is not a simple task. However, if we are serious about being action-oriented, and about fulfilling the various targets set by the MDGs and the World Summit, we must focus on the difficult questions of effectiveness and sustainability.

To understand what are the essential elements for successful implementation and the key lessons to be learned, we need to address a number of basic questions. What makes a project sustainable and cost effective? How do we define, monitor and evaluate its impact, particularly its educational and social impacts? How do we ensure the availability of human resources, local champions, and relevant content in local languages? What partnering models are most suitable? How do we satisfy infrastructure needs? How can we ensure that technology solutions are appropriate to the local conditions? And, what of the need to ensure an integrated approach, including the weighting and interdependency of all of these factors? This conference is a unique opportunity to explore these issues by drawing on those with first-hand experience from around the world.

Finally, let me conclude by extending my deep appreciation to the Club of Rome, whose President – His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal – is a good and long-standing friend of UNESCO. I am very pleased that Mr Raoul Weiler, President of the Brussels/European Union Chapter of the Club of Rome, is with us here today. I would also like to express my particular thanks to the World Bank Institute for making the GDLN available, as well as all the partners who have

supported the Conference: ReDSOFT; SES Global; Intel Corporation; NEWTEC; European Space Agency; Hewlett-Packard; Alcatel Space; MCI; and Microsoft.

This support is a vivid demonstration of civil society's strong engagement in this area and of our collective will to take up the challenge of the World Summit. Your ideas and conclusions will be carried forward to become an input to the second phase of the Summit in Tunis this November. Most importantly, your deliberations will inform us and guide us on how, collectively, we can become more effective in our action agenda to build human capacities through ICT.

I wish you every success in addressing this challenging agenda over the next three days of the Conference. To guide the deliberations to come, we are particularly fortunate to have with us today Mr Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania and, I am honoured to add, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the Construction of Knowledge Societies; and Mr Janis Karklins, President of the Preparatory Committee of the World Summit on the Information Society.

Thank you.