



**UNESCO Executive Board Meeting  
April 20, 2004**

**Statement by Ambassador Louise V. Oliver  
Permanent Delegate of the United States**

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Director-General, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Friends.

It is a great pleasure to represent the United States at this meeting of the Executive Board of UNESCO. Since my arrival at UNESCO six weeks ago, I have had the opportunity to meet many of my fellow Ambassadors and Permanent Delegates, as well as members of the Secretariat. I am grateful for the warm welcome I have received. Despite being a new member of this House, I feel very much at home.

During my meetings I have asked questions about the value added that UNESCO brings as an organization, and I have been struck by the unanimity of views that UNESCO is unique among international organizations: an intellectual body that attempts to find global solutions to global problems, while tending to the desires and needs of its sovereign member states. How best to carry out its mandate is the question that is being raised, and how can the organization achieve the focus, discipline, and accountability that are essential for positive results. The difficulty of this challenge is illustrated by the multitude of lines of action and program activities reported in the Document 169/EX 4, the Director-General's Report on the Execution of the Program.

The United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell, said when he officiated at my swearing-in ceremony in Washington, "Advancements in education, science, and technology, if combined with the spread of political and economic freedom, can save untold lives and lift millions out of poverty." He added that we must ensure that "UNESCO continues to reform so that its priorities are guided by its founding purposes."

So what are UNESCO's priorities? Clearly education is at the top. We are proud that our First Lady, Laura Bush - a former teacher and school librarian - is the Honorary Ambassador for the UN Decade of Literacy, and we are rallying the best and brightest our country has to offer to work with UNESCO to help eradicate illiteracy. Nothing is more important in our shared quest to promote peace and understanding than to empower people through education, starting with the ability to read and write.

During his speech to UNESCO last fall, the United States' Secretary of Education, Rod Paige, said "Our worldwide commitment to education must be relentless." In that spirit, we believe it is time for a fresh evaluation of the Education Sector, which would help us chart a more effective way forward not only in the Education For All initiative, but also in civic education to help promote democracy, education for tolerance, and HIV/AIDS education.

UNESCO has a critical role to play in helping countries emerging from conflict in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, and some African countries, to regain their footing and rebuild their education systems, which includes a focus on teacher training and equal access for women and girls. The United States is committed to this effort, and we encourage UNESCO to continue to support projects that will make a real and sustained difference for the children and families of these countries.

UNESCO's Education Sector has had some outstanding success in this area, as we saw in its excellent work producing and distributing new science and math textbooks for millions of Iraqi children. The project provided more textbooks than had been promised, under budget, and using local Iraqi publishing companies. We would also note that, as part of its mission to promote tolerance and peace, UNESCO could play a vital role in addressing the problem of racist and hateful language in dictionaries as well as textbooks.

We are also pleased that in addition to its ongoing programs to protect world cultural and natural heritage through the World Heritage Center, UNESCO's Culture Sector is putting a new focus on endangered cultural objects. With the support of member states, it is identifying areas of need, such as the archeological and cultural heritage of Iraq that documents over 10,000 years of human civilization, as well as the cultural heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem. We will continue to encourage these kinds of efforts.

I believe we all agree that cultural diversity is something to be treasured, and indeed we in the United States see it as one of our nation's greatest sources of strength. The challenge is to define the appropriate scope of an international instrument in this area, and we applaud the Director-General for taking a very methodical approach that seeks to clarify these issues before pushing ahead with an instrument. I hope that all here would agree that it is worth taking the time to reconcile different points of view on this topic to ensure that whatever instrument might emerge from these discussions is acceptable to all, and promotes rather than restricts the free flow of information and ideas that strengthens cross-cultural understanding and allows the rich diversity of human culture to flourish.

UNESCO is charged with leading efforts to reduce by half the number of people without access to safe drinking water, and we fully support this as a priority of the Science Sector. Since engineering skills are critical for making progress towards this goal, as well as towards the Millennium Summit goals of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, we will be discussing possible initiatives in this area, including a proposal supported by the American engineering community called "Engineering For a Better World."

Moreover, given the need for good data to inform policy and programs, the United States will make a further extra-budgetary contribution to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission to support its important work.

Natural hazards and disasters are another important aspect of the Natural Sciences Sector of UNESCO, as the tragic earthquake in Bam reminded us all. Disasters like volcanoes, floods and tsunamis can occur anywhere in the world, but with appropriate scientific study and advance planning, their human, economic, and cultural effects can be dramatically reduced. The International Geoscience Programme (IGCP), and the International Hydrological Programme (IHP) are two key programs that promote the exchange of scientific knowledge between countries, and ensure needed assessments of natural resources that are essential for progress towards sustainable development. UNESCO should encourage programs like these that transcend political and cultural boundaries.

We also applaud UNESCO's support of press freedom and independent media as essential ingredients of a free society. The Director-General's decision to present the World Press Freedom Prize in person is a fine example of this. As a member of the Intergovernmental Council of the International Program for the Development of Communication, we hope to be an active participant in identifying worthy projects for support in this area, such as the Voice of Afghan Women in Global Media that will establish Kabul's first community radio station.

In addition, UNESCO's initiatives in the Social and Human Science area can play an important role. The United States takes a particular interest in the area of bioethics, and we will continue to work to ensure that an instrument in this area sets appropriate ethical limits that fully respect human dignity in a rapidly evolving field, while respecting freedom of thought and inquiry.

In order to make UNESCO a stronger and more effective organization, we strongly support the Director-General's ongoing reform efforts, as well as his attempts to promote a more holistic approach towards UNESCO's work. The United States' return to UNESCO made possible a major increase in UNESCO's budget. Our challenge is to ensure that those additional funds, along with UNESCO's other resources, are used effectively to accomplish the priority goals of the organization. In addition to the Office of Internal Oversight, we believe that the Working Group on the Relations of the Three Organs can play a vital role in this process. We also support the call by the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and others for a clear and regular Executive Board agenda item to provide input in the development of future C5 budgets.

Finally, let me say how pleased the United States is to be a full member of this remarkable organization once again, and we look forward to working with all of you, as well as with our National Commission, to advance UNESCO's mission of promoting peace and security throughout the world.

Thank you.