DG/2003/062
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Koïchiro Matsuura

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

at the inauguration of the exhibition on Auroville:
an example of cultural diversity

UNESCO, 10 April 2003

Mr Chairperson of the General Conference,
Dr Singhvi, Member of the Executive Board,
Dr Joshi, President of the Auroville Fundation,
Mr Tripathi, Secretary to the Ministry of Education, Government of India,
Mme Ambassador,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to inaugurate this exhibition marking the thirty-fifth anniversary of the founding of Auroville. It is a city unique of its kind, one which brings to life a number of ideals that many of us hold dear. We are here, in fact, to celebrate the translation of an idea into practice. As an intellectual and ethical organization, UNESCO cannot fail to be fascinated by this experience.

UNESCO supported the foundation of this unusual experiment and, over the years, has continued to show interest in its unfolding development. Auroville was not created to serve the commercial or industrial needs of the region but for the sole purpose of putting into practice a set of ideals. Creating a city dedicated to peace, international understanding and human unity may have seemed a fantasy but some determined individuals made it possible. Inspired by the great Indian spiritual master Sri Aurobindo, guided by spiritual principles of the ancient Indian tradition of 'Sanatana Dharma', Auroville has, since its creation 35 years ago, developed into a full-fledged city of over 1500 inhabitants.

The creators of Auroville sought to create a city which could become a model for humanity. The very existence of this city makes each of us realize that such a dream is not impossible to achieve.

Many of the foundational principles guiding the Auroville community are close to the values promoted by UNESCO. And, over the years, the development of various ideas and practices has brought further similarities to the fore. For example, the increasing emphasis on dialogue, diversity and sustainable development in UNESCO's work resonates strongly with important aspects of the ongoing Auroville experiment. For illustration, let me read a brief quotation: "Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of economic development, understood not only in terms of economic growth but also a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence." This quotation comes from Article 3 of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity but its sentiments are, I am sure, familiar to the citizens of Auroville.

I am pleased that UNESCO, working closely with the Indian Permanent Delegation, has contributed to the organization of this exhibition. Such an event will enable people to discover the existence of Auroville and to reflect upon the values it upholds, which tie in with some of UNESCO's major priorities such as dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions; cultural diversity and culture as a factor for development; poverty eradication; quality education and lifelong learning; and renewable energies.

Tomorrow, there will be a seminar at which more information about Auroville will be made available and where there will be a chance to discuss the theory and practice of this noble experiment with members of the Auroville community. Our institutions share a common goal of seeking the improvement of humankind's welfare and peaceful coexistence among people belonging to different walks of life. Let us hope that this worthy project initiated in India will inspire people to live up to these ideals. It is thus with great pleasure that I declare this exhibition officially open.

Thank you.