

Russian Tycoon Abramian Pushes Dialogue of Civilizations as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador

In July 2003, UNESCO Director General Koichiro Matsuura, seeking to engage the initiative and drive of the private sector to the *Dialogue among Civilizations*, designated Ara Abramian, one of Russia's new generation of multimillionaire businessmen as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. Of Armenian origin, born into a well-to-do family in the small village of Malishka (literally, "my little darling"), Mr. Abramian brings a unique mix of experiences and skills to his new role.

Growing up in a home with five siblings and with both parents busy medical doctors, he learned early to compete and work hard to achieve success. With a degree from the Yerevan agricultural institute, he went to work as an engineer at the *Neyron* enterprise of the USSR Ministry of Electronic Industry and rose to become its Director-General. In 1994, he became the founding president of the *Concord* corporation, a post he continues to hold. *Concord* is now a conglomerate with interests in diamonds, construction, air transport, electronics, chemicals and publishing.

Mr. Abramian maintained an unimpeachable reputation for integrity and professionalism as he rose to prominence, partnering with the most prominent and influential Russian and foreign financial and industrial business groups. He was designated 'Man of the Year 2001' by the Russian media. With his close ties to Russian President Vladimir



Ara Abramian

Putin, Mr. Abramian has also been chosen to lead national business delegations to the United States, several European

countries and Argentina.

As founder-President of the Union of Armenians of Russia, Mr. Abramian has been a civic activist of long standing. Recently he was also elected President of the World Congress of Armenians in the Diaspora. He played a leading role in organizing Round Table discussions that brought together the representatives of 154 nationalities within Russia. Those meetings contributed significantly to defusing inter-ethnic tensions that inevitably arise in a country undergoing a massive transition. As a result, President Putin invited him into the Council of Nationalities, an advisory and liaison body.

Mr. Abramian's interest in and work with UNESCO began long before being appointed Goodwill Ambassador. He will continue to raise support for UNESCO's constructive programs on education, preservation of culture and promotion of science. He will also seek to promote closer collaboration between the public and private sectors.

He has proposed seven projects to advance the dialogue among civilizations through education and innovative use of technology, including a center for long-distance learning based in Paris. Other projects touch on the human heritage,



The Return of the USA

The return of the United States to UNESCO after a 19-year absence was a major production, with a delegation led by First Lady Laura Bush the cynosure of all eyes on 29 September 2003. Some 400 TV stations and major newspapers around the world covered the event. *Le Monde* expressed apprehension at the impact of a renewed US presence on UNESCO, but most others viewed US re-entry as a posi-

dialogue and reconciliation, and the training of young journalists. He would not speak about the funding of these initiatives, beyond saying that "money is not a problem."

Efforts to eliminate poverty and illiteracy must be the "first steps" towards peace and prosperity, he says. The new global interdependence "dictates joint efforts and the search for synergies by all concerned to alleviate the pain and suffering of those excluded and left behind." ❖

Dialogue of Civilizations: A Story in Progress

Speaking in Moscow in December 2003, UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura summed up the "story-in-progress" of international efforts at promoting a dialogue among civilizations. The highlights:

▀ In November 1998, the United Nations General Assembly, acting at the initiative of Iran, proclaimed 2001 as the "Year of Dialogue among Civilizations."

▀ In preparation for the launch of the International Year (and on the eve of the Millennium Assembly in September 2000), UNESCO and the United Nations organized two Round Tables on the Dialogue among Civilizations in New York, one engaging Heads of State, the other an international group of Eminent Persons.

▀ The UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in 2001 saw much activity around the world dedicated to promoting dialogue, peace and mutual understanding, the need for which was placed in sharp relief by the terrible events of 11 September.

▀ The UNESCO General Conference in early November 2001 recognized that the war against terror had made the ideals and aims of dialogue all the more important and urgent. In addition to a resolution against terrorism, it adopted the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*. The Declaration aims not only to preserve the world's cultural diversity but to promote intercultural dialogue.

▀ Also in November 2001, the UN General Assembly established the *Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations* as the agreed multilateral framework for continuing international debate and activities on this matter.

▀ The "New Delhi Declaration on *Dialogue among Civilizations - The Quest for New Perspectives*" was adopted by the first ever international ministerial conference on the *Dialogue of Civilizations* in July 2003. Subsequently, the 32nd Session of UNESCO General Conference adopted by acclamation a landmark resolution deciding that UNESCO's actions on the Dialogue among Civilizations should henceforth be guided by the framework of the *New Delhi Declaration*. That framework involves activities in four key areas: * Education * Science and Technology * Cultural diversity; and * Media and information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Further Development

Mr. Matsuura said the "time for statements of general principles and avowals of global support for intercultural dialogue" had passed, he said; "from now on, em-

phasis must be placed on concrete action and programmatic initiatives that can take "dialogue" from the conference hall into policies and practices with consequences for how people live together, interact with each other and understand one another." Pointing to the need to focus attention on "regions, sub-regions, countries and communities where intercultural dialogue is most needed," There was "considerable scope for further development and adaptation" of the process, for it was "unfolding at different levels - at times involving the highest levels of political leadership and sometimes becoming concrete in the work of teachers, scientists, researchers and media professionals."

One of UNESCO's "most urgent tasks is to encourage a wider ownership of the *dialogue among civilizations*" Mr. Matsuura said. The process had to become "something that all parts of society can relate to and become involved in: from primary school children to university professors, from government officials to civil society associations, from scientists and engineers to artists and writers." He mentioned several UNESCO initiatives that was taking the effort at mobilizing a dialogue among civilizations to areas where there had been a history of conflict:

▀ The Regional Forum on Dialogue among Civilizations (August 2003, Ohrid, Macedonia), brought together for the first time all eight Heads of State in the sub-region, including the five leaders of the former Yugoslav republics. The resulting "Message from Ohrid" promised cooperation and exchange "with a view to solidifying freedom and democracy and upholding human rights."

▀ The International Conference on Intercultural Dialogue and a Culture of Peace in Central Africa and the Great Lakes Region (Libreville, Gabon, November 2003), attracted over 100 political leaders, traditional chiefs, authors, intellectuals, academics and students from 24 countries, especially those in the geographical areas concerned.

▀ The international colloquium on dialogue among cultures and civilizations (Sana'a, Yemen, February 2004).

▀ A conference on "Eurasia in the 21st Century - Dialogue of Cultures or Conflict of Civilizations?" (to be held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, in June 2004).

▀ An Asia-Pacific Regional Conference on "Promoting Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations for Peace and Sustainable Development," to be hosted by Viet Nam in 2004.



Koichiro Matsuura



United States First Lady Laura Bush speaking at the opening of the 32nd General Conference of UNESCO in Paris, the first the US has attended as a member in 19 years.

tive step for multilateralism.

Budget Windfall

Much prominence was given to the fact that the re-entry would at one stroke increase the UNESCO budget by 22 per cent. Whether the money would be actually forthcoming immediately was cast in some doubt by the Senate Appropriations Committee, which struck out all of the \$71 million for UNESCO in the Bush administration's budget request. However, the money was put back in during the reconciliation of the House and Senate version. The financial weight of the re-entry was acknowledged by the hasty adjustments made by *Group I* countries that were bidding for election to the Executive Board. Portugal, Greece, Monaco and Luxembourg dropped out of the process, and the US was elected, along with Canada, France, Italy, and Switzerland.

Jalali Says Adieu

There was also a note of procedural comic relief prior to the US First Lady's appearance on stage at the opening meeting of the 32nd General Conference. Traditionally, the outgoing President of the General Conference presides at the opening meeting, and his/her replacement takes over the gavel only after the ceremonial opening is over. But the United States did not want Mrs. Bush to speak with Ahmed Jalali of Iran in the Chair, so Michael Omolewa of Nigeria was quickly installed before the

US First Lady appeared on the podium. However, Ambassador Jalali did not go quietly; his humorous final speech (perhaps performance would be a more apt word) had delegates grinning.

Graceful Speech

Mrs. Bush, who earlier in 2003 had been designated Honorary Ambassador for the UN Literacy Decade (2003-2012), made a graceful speech, saying the United States had "much to offer and ... much to learn" and that "given the many changes in our world today, our work is more urgent and more important than at any time in UNESCO's history." She highlighted the importance of programs for primary education for all, especially girls, and for the reconstruction of education systems in post-conflict areas. In Iraq, she noted, 80 per cent of primary and secondary schools and all but two universities had reopened: "5 million text book free of Baathist propaganda — thanks to a UNESCO program" — was being distributed to schools. While speaking of the need to "preserve the cultural heritage of our past, and illuminate a future of scientific advance and discovery with careful ethics and a reverence for the dignity of life," she steered clear of any explicit reference to the controversies over the initiative to draft a Convention on cultural diversity. *See below.*

32nd General Conference

The 32nd session of the General Con-

ference took some important decisions. It adopted a Convention on intangible cultural heritage (*see separate story*); adopted international instruments on multilingualism on the Internet and on human genetic data; and initiated action to draft a standard-setting convention on cultural diversity. The initiative on the Convention looks back to the adoption in 2001 of the *Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, which says such diversity is part of humanity's "common heritage" and deems its protection a concrete and ethical imperative, inseparable from respect of human dignity.

Quick Controversy

Expectations that the return of the United States would lead to controversy over the proposed Convention were swiftly realized. The US delegation, which had announced its intention to remain initially in a "listening mode," wasted no time circulating a draft resolution to counter the unanimous recommendation of UNESCO's Executive Board that the Director-General begin work on the Convention with a view to submitting a complete draft to the 33rd General Conference in 2005. The United States views the proposal with consid-

erable reservations because of the potential of a Convention to inhibit free cross-cultural flow of ideas and cultural products (of which it is the world's leading exporter). The US draft emphasized the importance of Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* on protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. It recognized the importance to artists and creators of intellectual property protection and the free circulation of contemporary cultural goods and services within and across borders. And it invited the Director-General to convene a group of experts to consider the ways in which UNESCO might best *support* and promote cultural diversity, taking into account relevant international legal instruments adopted by other organizations, including UNCTAD, WTO and WIPO. The DG was asked in the US draft to report on those consultations to the 169th session of the Executive Board.

The US move led to a passionate discussion over several days, with a majority of countries (including customary US allies Portugal and Canada), in opposition. The Portuguese representative in an emotional aside said that the origin of mankind and its civilizations owed little to Hollywood and the movie industry. The French Minister of Culture declared that the Convention would fill a legal vacuum and create a great opportunity for dialogue aimed at preventing a Hollywood culture "monopoly." The Canadian Minister also went to bat for the proposed Convention, arguing that in a period of globalization country's had the right to defend their domestic culture and languages. In Canada — where American cultural influence was very strong — there was an increasing awareness of the need for a national policy to protect indigenous cultural and linguistic diversity. She noted that only 3 per cent of English and 17 per cent of French movies produced in Canada made it to domestic screens.

Two days into the debate, the International Network for Cultural Diversity (INCD) consisting of more than 400 NGOs representing artists, cultural producers, academics and cultural activities from 70 countries issued a *communique* explaining why the US draft resolution would deter progress in the adoption of the Convention. After a number of informal negotiating sessions and bilateral powwows, a compromise proposal was presented by Japan. It recommended that the Director General submit to the 33rd session of the General Conference in 2005 a preliminary draft on the protection of cultural diversity and artistic expression, with an accompanying report explaining the scope and substantive content of the proposed standards. For the moment, the movement towards a Convention on Cultural Diversity seems to have stalled. ❖



The wonderful collage of human diversity is ancient; the need to protect it is new.

UNESCO to Protect "Intangible" Culture

A form of traditional chanting in India that has kept alive the wisdom of the Vedas for well over three millennia, the thousand-year Guqin musical tradition of China, the encyclopedic knowledge of plant species maintained by itinerant doctors in Bolivia, the sand drawing of Vanuatu that cut across linguistic lines; the woodcraft of the Zafimaniry of Madagascar: these are among the 28 "Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity" declared by a UNESCO jury on 7 November 2003.

Noting that three weeks earlier the agency's 32nd General Conference had adopted an International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, UNESCO Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura said that "20 years of pioneering action" had led to "the beginning of a new era." The jury's second declaration — the first was in 2001 — underlined the urgent need for action to protect and preserve the most "fragile, perishable and vulnerable" elements of the human heritage, he said.

See www.unesco.org for more details.



UNESCO PHOTO

The House of Slaves on the island of Gorée in Senegal. Built in 1776 by the Dutch, it was the last of a number of slave houses to be used by slavers. The earliest houses on Gorée date back to 1536 and were built by Portuguese, the first Europeans to set foot there (in 1444). The Dutch Slave House is well preserved, and has rooms marked out for men, women and children, as well as those who were "temporarily unfit."

Lively Debate in Mediterranean Forum: Is Islam a Threat?

by Mehri Madarshahi

After three days of lively discussion about the troubled relationship between Islam and the West at the *Forum Euro Mediterranee* at UNESCO in January, there was one broad area of consensus: there is no "clash of civilizations."

No one denied that tensions between East and West have been aggravated and that the Islamic threat is real, dangerous and distressing. But the reason was not enmity. To the contrary, it was globalization, and the growing intimacy among peoples, regions, religions and civilizations.

Some saw 9/11 as an indicator of a battle already in progress between the Judaeo-Christian Western democracies and a radical Islamic world bent on conquest; some even saw that clash as not just inevitable but desirable. But everyone foresaw a resolution, an intellectual and political process that would play out over the next decade.

Participating in the Forum was a wide spectrum of social activists from the Mediterranean region as well as the United States. President Chirac, Foreign

Minister Dominique de Villepin and former President of Senegal Abdou Diouf (current Secretary-General of the organization of French-speaking countries, *Francophonie*), were among the most prominent politicians present. There were business executives, scientists, academics, teachers and many leading journalists and correspondents of the French TV and radio.

One panel debated the history of Islam and its contribution to humanity's cultural heritage. Some speakers contrasted the rigidity of Islamic practice and belief today with the spirit of enlightenment and discovery in science and philosophy in the early period of the religion. Most Muslim participants disassociated themselves from jihadist violence, seeing it as the result of political manipulation of religion. In the name of the many philosophers, poets and scientists of the Arab world who had, down the centuries, contributed to the shaping of modern Western civilization, they called for renewed dialogue between the opposite shores of the Mediterranean.

Another panel discussed "the United

Year to Commemorate Slavery Officially Launched in Ghana

At a ceremony in Cape Coast, Ghana, one of the slave trade's most active centres and today a *World Heritage* site, UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura officially launched the *International Year to Commemorate the Struggle Against Slavery and its Abolition* on January 10. The Year was proclaimed by the UN General Assembly, with UNESCO as the lead agency for implementation.

Mr. Matsuura said that "recalling the memory of a tragedy that for long years remained hidden or unrecognized" was a "duty" the world owed to the victims of a "crime against humanity." He urged that "this major episode in the history of humanity, whose consequences are permanently imprinted in the world's geography and economy, should take its full place in the school textbooks and curricula of every country in the world."

As the lead agency for the Year, UNESCO will undertake a wide range of activities in cooperation with States, National Commissions, non-governmental organizations, groups and individuals to promote the development of historical sites connected to the slave trade, and celebrate events and personalities linked to its abolition. The goal will be to deepen knowledge of slavery and the slave trade, and highlight the philosophical, political and legal legacies that we must continue to deal with. Activities will focus on three areas: Scientific Research, Living Memory, and Encounters and Dialogue. They include:

- Meetings of experts on the history of slavery, its impact on the populations affected by the trade, the slave trade's

consequences for cultural diversity and the transfer of knowledge, and contemporary slavery and racism. On March 21, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, UNESCO will launch a project called "International Coalition of Cities United

Milestones

The year 2004 marks the bicentenary of the first independent black state, Haiti, a symbol of the slaves' resistance (www.unesco.org/culture/unsa). The uprising in Saint-Domingue (present-day Haiti and the Dominican Republic), which began on the night of August 22, 1791, played a decisive role in the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. August 23 is celebrated each year as the *International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition*.

(see http://www.unesco.org/culture/dialogue/slave/html_eng/day.shtml).

In the Americas, slavery was first formally abolished in Saint Domingue (1793), and last in Brazil (1888). It was banned by the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* and by the 1956 UN.

States as a common enemy or a shared ally." Speakers focused on the emergence of America as a "hyperpower," its "missionary" foreign policy and responses to its newly risen "Empire." Former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros Ghali reviewed the present unilateralist policies of the United States with its history of support for multilateralism, which was mainly an American concept advanced by Presidents Roosevelt and Truman. Robert Baer, a former CIA officer, argued that present "imperial policies" could not be sustained because of the increasing financial burden they imposed and growing public opposition. Former French Interior Minister and Presidential Candidate Jean-Pierre Chevènement saw the US as neither a common enemy — for it was tackling problems that affected all — nor a shared ally, for it was forging exclusive alliances for specific purposes, and acting unilaterally when it wanted. Multilateralism could only be revived on a new political consensus that gave a central role to the United Nations.

A Panel on "Is the Arab world undergoing another colonization" touched upon the fear inspired by 'rogue states' and the rise of Islamism that provided a

justification for interventionism. "The United States has occupied two Muslim countries, Afghanistan and Iraq, and indirectly occupies Palestine" said one speaker. Some discussants thought democratic values were a neocolonial Western imposition on the Arab world. Despite such views there was a broad agreement that the way forward involved democratization and modernization of the Arab world. A concluding panel on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict discussed the *Geneva Initiative* of Yossi Beilin and Yasser Abed Rabbo, both of whom were present and active participants.

Summing up the main strands of thought that had been reflected in three days of intense discussion, former French Foreign Minister Hubert Vedrine underlined the need for constructive dialogue aimed at reducing tensions and resolving conflicts on the basis of justice; genuine social reforms, particularly the promotion of gender equality; broader education efforts in the Arab and Muslim world; and accelerated economic development. The Forum was largely a men-only affair, a shortcoming the organizers pledged to remedy at the next event, planned for 2005.

The Slave Ships Are Gone Not Slavery



Although universally banned now, slavery continues to exist in various forms, including bonded labour for debt, forced labour of adults and children, sexual exploitation of children, trafficking and displacement of human beings and forced marriage.

The non-governmental organization *Anti-Slavery* says at least 20 million people are held in bonded labour around the world.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) puts the estimated number of people trafficked for bonded or forced labour at 700,000 a year.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has published estimates putting the number of child labourers at 245 million in 2002. The ILO further says that 1.2 million children fall victim to traffickers every year. It has denounced the trade in children in central and western Africa reporting that, "10,000 to 15,000 Malian children work on plantations in Côte d'Ivoire - many of them victims of trafficking.

Nigeria reports that in 1996, some 4,000 children were trafficked from Cross River State to various parts within and outside its borders.

Benin registered over 3,000 trafficked children between 1995 and 1999.

Against Racism", which will include a series of regional seminars and conferences to define a 10-point action plan to fight racism at the municipal level

► Research studies focusing on the preservation of documents and the digitization of archive collections, as well as on the establishment of databases. On the occasion of the 15th International Archives Conference (Vienna, Austria, August 23-29), an international conference on the archives of the slave trade will take place as part of the "Archives of the Slave Trade" project (webworld.unesco.org/slave_quest/en/).

► Creation of slavery and slave trade museums and research centres, such as the one planned for the island of Gorée (Senegal), the place from which millions of African slaves left for the Americas and today a World Heritage site, and the restoration of landmarks like Brazil House in Accra and Bois Caïman in Haiti, with the aim of setting up tourist itineraries of remembrance.

► Exhibitions, including "The Slave Route: Africa's Connections With Jamaica" (February 27, UNESCO, Paris); "The Slave Trade and Abolitions" (travelling exhibition organized in cooperation with New York's Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture that is scheduled to be presented at the Headquarters of the United Nations during the 59th session of the General Assembly in late 2004); works by French sculptor Gérard Voisin that evoke intercultural dialogue (September, Nantes, France).

► Concerts, including a July performance in Paris featuring Gilberto Gil with Cesaria Evora and Manu Dibango

(pending confirmation), proceeds from which fund UNESCO projects for the rehabilitation of Slave Route sites.

► Celebrations of leaders of the fight against slavery, such as Toussaint Louverture, Victor Schoelcher, Moreau de Saint-Mery and Vicente Guerrero. Moreover, this year UNESCO will create a medal and award to commemorate Toussaint Louverture and the fight against racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance.

► Meetings, such as the Third Congress of African, American and Caribbean Writers, whose scheduled theme is "From the Abolition of Slavery to the Fight Against Colonialism and the Place of Blacks in the Age of Globalisation" (date and place to be decided) and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, which brings craftspeople, musicians, cooks and traditional storytellers together in Washington, D.C. each summer; this year (June 23 to July 4), the festival is joining forces with UNESCO to honour "Haiti: Freedom and Creativity".

► UNESCO is also sponsoring the "Forgotten Slaves" project of the *Groupe de Recherche en Archéologie Navale* (France). The recent discovery of the wreck of the *Utile*, a slave ship of the French East India Company that sank off the coast of Tromelin Island in the Indian Ocean in 1761, is at the root of this project.

Background

In 1994, UNESCO launched "The Slave Route" project to raise consciousness of the trade that from the 16th to 19th century took countless lives and changed the economics and demographics of Europe, Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean (www.unesco.org/cul-

www.unesco.org/cul-ture/slaveroute). The project's educational component, "Breaking the Silence," involves some 100 schools on the three continents. Its research component has produced two books, *Voices of Slaves* and *Voyages of Slaves*, for use in the schools. A third volume, *Visions of Slaves*, will come out in 2004. An *International Youth Forum* in August will launch a worldwide drive to mobilize schools in the fight against racism (www.unesco.org/education/asp and www.antislavery.org/breakingthesilence).

One of the goals of the Year is "knowing and recognizing the major imprint of African cultures on the formation of the world's cultures and civilizations." The millions of African slaves uprooted from their homes, deported and sold in the Americas, brought with them not only their spiritual and cultural values, but also traditional know-how, as shown in a series of works published by UNESCO, among them the *General History of Africa, Tradition orale et archives de la traite négrière* (2001), *Déraison, esclavage et droit: les fondements idéologiques et juridiques de la traite négrière et de l'esclavage* (2002), *Montesquieu, Rousseau, Diderot: du genre humain au bois d'ébène, les abolitions de l'esclavage* (2002), *Les Sources orales de la traite négrière en Guinée et en Sénégal* (2003), *Tradition orale liée à la traite négrière et à l'esclavage en Afrique centrale* (2003) and *Lieux de mémoire de l'esclavage et de la traite négrière*

(Angola - Cap Vert - Guinée Bissau - Sao Tome et Principe). In 2004, UNESCO's "Iron Roads in Africa" project will publish "*The Origins of Iron Metallurgy in Africa - New light on its antiquity: West and Central Africa*" (see www.unesco.org/publishing).

To trace the slave trade itineraries, the Slave Route project and the World Tourism Organization (WTO) in 1995 launched the Slave Route cultural tourism programme for Africa, aimed at identifying, rehabilitating, restoring and promoting sites, buildings and places of remembrance of the slave trade. This economic, historical and ethical approach to tourism reflects the duty of remembrance (www.unesco.org/culture/dialogue/slave/html_fr/tourism.shtml).

About ten significant sites on the Slave Route have already been inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List: the island of Gorée in Senegal (<http://webworld.unesco.org/goree/>); the forts and castles of Volga and Accra in Ghana; Mozambique Island; the ruins of Kilwa Kisiwani and Songo Mnara in Tanzania; the royal palaces of Abomey in Benin; the Sans-souci citadel in Haiti; and several historic centres and towns in Brazil, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Panama. Though not directly connected to the slave trade, Robben Island in South Africa remains the most powerful symbol of one of its lasting consequences: the spread of a racist mentality, systematized by the apartheid regime.

First Global Education Digest Provides Key Performance Indicators

How to gain an accurate picture of the performance of education systems around the world? How to gauge participation and school completion rates? A new publication from UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS) in Montreal, Canada, provides answers, using the latest available statistics from countries around the world.

The first edition of *Global Education Digest*, which is to be issued annually, reports data for the school years 1999/2000 and 2000/2001. An accompanying CD-Rom includes that data as well as information on school year 1998/1999.

This first edition of the Digest presents detailed statistical tables from early childhood to higher education, using categories set in the *International Standard Classification of Education* (ISCED97). It also provides data on foreign students — how many there are, where they are from and where they are studying — and on how much money governments are spending on education.

The Digest also presents a chapter entitled "State of Global Education Statistics: Measuring Progress Towards

Universal Primary Education." It analyses the different yardsticks used to measure educational participation, progress and completion, and underlines the importance of using a range of indicators in monitoring educational achievements. It emphasizes the need to evaluate the knowledge acquired by students during their schooling, especially in developing countries.

"This new digest is a solid first step towards making data more useful" says Denise Lievesley, Director of the UIS. The comparative framework of the *Digest*, she says, "allows countries to benchmark their progress against neighbouring or similar countries and provides a lens to interpret the outcomes of education reforms from different parts of the world."

The Global Education Digest and CD-Rom are available free of charge from: UNESCO Institute for Statistics Publications, P.O. Box 6128, Succursale Centre-Ville, Montreal, Quebec H3C 3J7, Canada. The education database can be accessed and the report downloaded from the UIS website at: <http://www.uis.unesco.org>.