

37th session of the General Conference of UNESCO

Michiko UENO, Vice Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and
Technology

World Conference on ESD: Ministerial-level breakfast meeting speech
(November 8, 2013 (Friday), 8:00-9:30, UNESCO headquarters)

Madame Director-General Bokova,
Distinguished Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bonjour (Good morning). Je m'appelle Michiko Ueno (My name is Michiko Ueno). And I am the Vice Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan.

In Japan, "Education rebuilding" is one of the most important challenges for the Prime Minister Abe's Cabinet. Discussions at the National Diet are currently underway. It is for this reason that Hakubun Shimomura, the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, regrettably could not make it here, and I am here on his behalf representing the Japanese Government.

Exactly one year from now, the UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development will be held in Japan. I am delighted to see here today ministers from many countries that are particularly active in the promotion of ESD. I am also extremely grateful to Madame Director-General Bokova and UNESCO for making this meeting happen. As a government representative of the host country for next year's

event, it is a great honor for me to stand in front of you and speak about the 2014 World Conference and my country's efforts relating to ESD.

The Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, DESD, was proposed at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit by then the Japanese Prime Minister, Junichiro Koizumi. A resolution confirming this was adopted at the 57th United Nations General Assembly. Since then, we have been committed to promoting ESD by providing financial contributions through the Japanese Funds-in-Trust. Today, I am delighted to see that even more countries across the world are engaged in ESD.

We have also actively promoted ESD within Japan. One example concerning school education is the incorporation of the principles of ESD into the national basic policy and programme for the promotion of education, as well as into the guidelines for the organization of curriculum.

The learning with the viewpoint of ESD, aims to enable children to identify the challenges associated with building a sustainable society and to equip them with the skills and attitudes required to solve them. Therefore, it emphasizes competencies relating to critical thinking, planning with a long term vision, communication, attitudes valuing interpersonal relations and connections, and a willingness to participate. These are all essential attitudes and skills for children.

In Japan, the UNESCO Associated Schools are the base for the promotion of ESD. The number of these schools has grown from 19 in 2005 to 647 as of today. Let me introduce one particular example of

Education for Disaster Risk Reduction in Kesenuma City in Miyagi Prefecture. The city suffered enormous damage in the Great East Japan Earthquake on 11 March, 2011. Schools in this area had repeated training on what to do if an earthquake or tsunami struck. These trainings enabled most of the children in the city to escape, thus saving their lives. Furthermore, some junior high school students voluntarily took care of local evacuees in understaffed evacuation centers. I see this as a good example of the ESD principle in practice, where students think and act by themselves.

The world is currently facing many serious issues. These include climate change, natural disasters, population growth, poverty, conflict, energy problems, and the extinction of certain species. It is precisely such uncertainty that makes ESD even more important.

I, myself, am a strong advocate of the principles of ESD. The 2014 UNESCO World Conference on ESD is more than simply a meeting on ESD, it provides an important forum for thinking about the preferable direction of education. It is an important opportunity to look back on ESD activities to date and engage ourselves in discussions on concrete ESD policies going forward. 2014 will be the final year of the DESD, but it should also be considered as the beginning of the further development of ESD. I look forward to the participation of you all, the countries which are dedicated to advancing ESD. Let us take the opportunity of the Conference next year to discuss policies to educate the future young custodians of a sustainable society.

Distinguished delegates, as I am sure you are aware, lively discussions concerning the post-2015 development agenda are currently underway in the UN, UNESCO, and other international institutions. Essential elements of this are sustainable development, improving the quality of education, and embracing cultural and religious diversity to live together in harmony. ESD helps to achieve these, and is an important principle that is consistent with the future direction for education.

How extensively we will be able to put ESD into practice in the future depends, distinguished delegates, on your proactive participation. I also look forward to seeing UNESCO demonstrating even greater leadership in the aim of further advancing ESD. Building up to the World Conference next year, let us work together to bring even greater momentum to the ESD movement.

I very much look forward to seeing you all again next November in Japan.

Merci pour votre attention. (Thank you very much for your attention.)