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Organización
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Организация
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, the Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the Inauguration Ceremony
of the Museum of Contemporary Art**

Baku, 20 March 2009

Mr President of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, First Lady of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with you today to celebrate the opening of the Baku Museum of Contemporary Art on the occasion of the Novruz holiday.

Allow me first to congratulate President Aliyev on his brilliant re-election last autumn. I am confident that your second term will further consolidate your skilful stewardship of the country's development. Such skills are particularly important in these times of global uncertainty. It will also permit further strengthening of the excellent cooperation that exists between Azerbaijan and UNESCO, particularly in the fields of education and culture – two of our top priorities.

Let me also extend my warmest thanks and admiration to the First Lady of Azerbaijan Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, who is a distinguished Member of the National Parliament and also UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. Since 2004 you have been instrumental in making enormous progress in bilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan and UNESCO. You have also become an indispensable ally in our work to safeguard the cultural heritage – in particular the living heritage – not only of Azerbaijan but other parts of the world as well.

I would also like to congratulate the distinguished painter Altai Sadirh Zade, who was entrusted with the difficult task of selecting and installing over 800 paintings and sculptures for display in the museum's galleries. I am pleased to note among

the numerous Azerbaijani artists represented here, the work of the renowned landscape painter, Sattar Bahlulzade. UNESCO is proud to be officially associated with the commemorations of the centenary of his birth this year.

In celebrating this new showcase for contemporary creation, let us reflect on the crucial role of museums in delivering UNESCO's ideals around the world. In addition to being the repositories of cultural identity and diversity, museums and their collections are also powerful vectors for human development and social cohesion. Not only because they underpin economic development, but also because they provide meaning and a sense of identity and continuity to the life of all societies.

These benefits are particularly precious in the current era of rapid change, mass migration and economic crisis. As the international community searches for appropriate solutions, it is becoming increasingly clear that the models that guided notions of progress in the twentieth century need to be fundamentally reassessed.

UNESCO believes that culture has a fundamental role to play in building more sustainable strategies for development and stands ready to work with the international community to do so.

Indeed, UNESCO's extensive experience has shown that cultural heritage and museums can help build and preserve peace and establish links between communities and their cultural history to pave the way for promoting dialogue and establishing national identities.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I would like to reiterate our congratulations to the Government and people of Azerbaijan for enriching Baku's cultural landscape with a public museum devoted to contemporary creation. I am convinced that in doing so, you are promoting one of humanity's most valuable and renewable resources: human creativity.

Thank you for your attention.