

**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO
on International Youth Day 2004**

12 August 2004

International Youth Day has been celebrated annually since 1999 as an occasion for focusing attention on the needs of all young people - defined by the United Nations to mean those aged between 10 and 24.

The theme of International Youth Day 2004, “Youth and Intergenerational Relations: Young People and the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family”, is a timely reminder of the importance of intergenerational solidarity. This is particularly the case in today's changing world, where major economic, social, cultural, political and demographic changes are forcing us to redefine traditional family and community structures. The rapidity with which populations are changing and will continue to change will also require us to think carefully about the support structures, for young and old alike, that we require and desire.

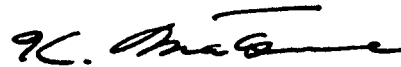
Young people currently make up one-fifth of the world's population. By 2050, however, the proportion of those aged over 60 will increase from 10 to 21%, while those aged 15 and under will drop from 30 to 21%. This means that, for the first time, the proportion of children/young adolescents and older persons will be equal.

While developed countries are already having to address the rapid ageing of their populations, developing countries are also facing major challenges: high youth unemployment, growing numbers of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS, and disproportionately high numbers of young people themselves infected. These and other challenges are placing enormous strains on already stretched resources and affecting the very fabric of society everywhere.

UNESCO considers the intergenerational approach to be an effective and inclusive instrument for its lifelong learning programmes like “Learning Throughout Life for All”. UNESCO's contribution to this year's theme will therefore concentrate on its work within the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003–2012). In this context, UNESCO considers “intergenerational” to include the following: older people working with children and youth; children and youth serving older people; older adults and youth collaborating to serve the community; and older adults and youth together involving themselves in informal learning activities. We look to the UNESCO Clubs to play an important role in such intergenerational activities.

Furthermore, UNESCO will continue to work with civil society groups to promote intergenerational dialogue and to encourage greater awareness of this important issue among community groups of all ages. To this end, we will continue the promotion of voluntary service programmes, the development of young women scientists through our partnership with L'Oréal, the extension of projects such as “World Heritage in Young Hands”, and the focus on projects which improve teacher quality, programmes which are all aimed at generating intergenerational dialogue and understanding.

The United Nations will celebrate this year's International Youth Day as the culmination of a week-long World Youth Festival, to be held in Barcelona from 8 to 14 August 2004, within the context of the Universal Forum of Cultures. From 9 to 12 August 2004, UNESCO will organise a Youth Forum that will be attended by some 10,000 young people. Let us join together to make this Youth Forum a success and to commit ourselves to better integrating the needs and aspirations of youth into UNESCO's programmes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Matsuura', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Koïchiro Matsuura