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Office of the Spokesperson
La Porte-parole

Director-General meets with H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan and inaugurates the International Centre for Synchrotron Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME)

From 2 to 3 November 2008, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, visited the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to inaugurate the International Centre for Synchrotron Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME)*.

Prior to this ceremony, the Director-General was received in audience, on 3rd November, by H.M. King Abdullah II of Jordan. During their meeting, held in the presence of H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, Mr Tayser Al-Nahar Al Noaimi, Minister of Education and Mr Khaled Toukan, Director of the SESAME Centre, they discussed the fruitful cooperation between Jordan and the Organization. The Director-General reiterated UNESCO's commitment to helping regional scientific cooperation through capacity-building, as well as education and research, and expressed the hope that SESAME would foster better understanding and tolerance in the region and beyond. They also discussed the international situation in the Middle East, in particular with regards to the promotion by UNESCO of the safeguarding of the cultural heritage of the Old City of Jerusalem, as well as of the integrity and authenticity of the Mughrabi Ascent. "I am confident that UNESCO, on the basis of the recent decision adopted by the Executive Board at its 180th session, will be able to maintain a fruitful dialogue and cooperation with the parties concerned, in order to preserve this heritage of outstanding universal value", said the Director-General.

Subsequently, Mr Matsuura, together with H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, Mr Khaled Toukan, Director of the SESAME Centre and Professor Erwig Schopper, President of the SESAME Council, participated in the "soft" inauguration ceremony for the International Centre for Synchrotron Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME) at Al-Balqa University in Jordan. The ceremony was placed under the auspices of H.M. King Abdullah II and took place in the presence of ministers and representatives from SESAME Member and Observer countries, as well as numerous ambassadors and members of the international scientific community. This inauguration marks the handing over of the building to SESAME and the installation of its secretariat.

In his introductory speech, Mr Matsuura emphasized the fact that SESAME would provide the region with a world-class laboratory for basic research ranging from physics to the biological and medical sciences and archaeology. "It is a major opportunity to boost science and technology in the Middle East, helping to promote economic growth and transform the region into a leader of innovation",

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he stated.

Mr Matsuura also underlined the key opportunity offered by SESAME to promoting peace through science. "In today's world of increasing insecurity and conflict, it is particularly gratifying to see a Centre that allows scientists from this troubled region to work together in a spirit of cooperation and shared purpose. Such collaboration will not only help foster greater solidarity and mutual understanding. The bringing together of diverse cultures will also create an enriching environment, conducive to open debate, fresh thinking and inventiveness", said the Director-General.

In this context, Mr Matsuura paid tribute to the many countries, such as Germany, France, Switzerland, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, that are providing SESAME with the equipment and beam lines necessary for it to function. "I applaud this demonstration of international solidarity. It is a perfect example of how the North can help develop scientific capacity in the South", he underlined. He added that UNESCO would continue to encourage countries of the region and neighbouring areas to join SESAME, whether as Members or Observers, to help develop networking with synchrotron radiation laboratories in other countries, and mobilize extra-budgetary resources.

"UNESCO is proud that this inspiring project has been set up under its auspices, and that it is the depository of SESAME's Statutes. You can rest assured that UNESCO will continue to support SESAME's development during its new phase of operations", concluded Mr Matsuura.

In his address, Professor Schopper, who is handing over the presidency of the SESAME Council to Professor Sir Chris Llewellyn-Smith, warmly thanked the Director-General of UNESCO for his unwavering support since 1999 and personal efforts to bring this unique and innovative project to fruition: "Without his support", he said, "we would not have been able to set-up such a cutting-edge research laboratory in the Middle-East".

On the eve of the "soft" inauguration of the SESAME Centre, Mr Matsuura had participated in a dinner offered in his honour by H.R.H. Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal, in the presence of Mr Tayser Al-Nahar Al Noaimi, Minister of Education, Mr Salah Bashir, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Abdul Fattah Salah, Minister of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places, Mrs Hala Latouf, Minister of Social Development, and Mr Khaled Toukan, Director of the SESAME Centre.

During his stay, Mr Matsuura also met with the Prime Minister of Jordan, Mr Nader Dhahabi, in the presence of Mr Tayser Al-Nahar Al Noaimi, Minister of Education, and of Mr Nasser Judeh, Minister of Information. During their meeting, the Director-General expressed his appreciation for UNESCO's cooperation with the Hashemite Kingdom, which he felt had been immensely strengthened over recent years, most particularly in the fields of science and education.