United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربيـة والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the "Soft" inauguration
of the SESAME Centre

Allan, Jordan, 3 November 2008

Your Royal Highness Prince Ghazi,
Dr Toukan,
Professor Schopper,
Distinguished Delegates and Observers of the Council of SESAME,
Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to be here for this milestone in the SESAME project. This is a very moving moment for me.

In December 1999, just one month after I assumed my responsibilities as Director-General of UNESCO, I attended the second session of the Interim Council of the SESAME project. Professor Schopper presented the initiative, which at the time was struggling hard to find support. I promised Professor Schopper and the Council that UNESCO and I personally would do everything possible to realize this unique and exciting project. I did so because I immediately saw that SESAME offered a remarkable opportunity for international and regional scientific cooperation, and for advancing science in the service of peace.

Over the past nine years, Professor Schopper and I have worked hard to see this special day when we inaugurate the SESAME Centre. On each of my visits to Jordan, I have been able to watch the SESAME project grow.

In June 2000, I joined His Majesty at the opening of the third meeting of the Interim Council of SESAME, when we were all very happy to learn that the generous offer of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to host the Centre had been accepted.

In January 2003, I had the pleasure of participating in the ground-breaking ceremony for the SESAME Centre, held under His Majesty's auspices.

Today, we are here together again in SESAME's new home to witness the beginnings of the installation of the SESAME machine. This is a very proud moment.

None of this tremendous progress would have been possible without the strong backing of Jordan, and in particular the leadership of His Majesty. Not only has His Majesty provided the building and a portion of the funds for the up-grading of the machine. His Majesty has also shown a personal commitment and enthusiasm for the project, and a real understanding of its significance to the region.

I was received today in audience by His Majesty who reaffirmed his very strong interest and support for SESAME. It is a great honour to have with us today His Royal Highness Prince Ghazi, who is representing His Majesty. Please convey our sincere gratitude to His Majesty.

I wish to pay tribute to Professor Khaled Toukan, former Minister of Higher Education of Jordan, and Director of SESAME, who has done so much to take this initiative forward. Dr Toukan, I share you feeling that we have come a long way, even though we still have much to do.

Let me also issue a warm welcome to Ministers from SESAME Member and Observer countries. It is extremely encouraging to see such high-level representation, which demonstrates the growing support for the project not only across the region but the world over.

I would like to recognize the many countries that are providing SESAME with the equipment and beamlines necessary for it to function. My special thanks go to Germany, which donated the dismantled BESSY I storage ring and injector system that is at the heart of the SESAME project. Since then many other countries have offered support, namely France, Switzerland, the United States of America and now the United Kingdom which is providing a number of beamlines. I applaud this demonstration of international solidarity. It is a perfect example of how the North can help develop scientific capacity in the South.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to Professor Schopper, who is stepping down from the presidency of SESAME today. In 2004, I had the pleasure to award Professor Schopper UNESCO's Albert Einstein Gold Medal in recognition of his outstanding contribution to science and international cooperation. Today, let me once again pay tribute, not only to a brilliant physicist, but also to a man who throughout his career has shown an unwavering commitment to fostering peace and understanding through scientific exchange. It is his determination and wisdom that have brought SESAME to where it is now.

I am confident that Professor Sir Chris Llewellyn-Smith, who is taking over the presidency, will continue the excellent work of Professor Schopper.

Your Royal Highness,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

SESAME will provide this region with a world-class laboratory for basic research in disciplines 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.

Several hundred scientists from the Middle East and other parts of the world are expected to use this facility in their research. This will make SESAME a unique international and multidisciplinary Centre for scientific discovery and application. I strongly urge all countries of the region and neighbouring areas which have not yet joined SESAME to come on board, so that they too may reap the many benefits to be derived from membership of this state-of-the-art facility.

For UNESCO, one central dimension of the project is the opportunity it offers to promote 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.

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.

In addition to continuing to encourage other countries to join the Centre, whether as Members or Observers, UNESCO will also help develop networking with synchrotron radiation laboratories in other countries, facilitate where possible the acquisition of equipment by SESAME, and mobilize extra-budgetary resources.

UNESCO is not alone in believing in SESAME's potential. Numerous other organizations are working to promote its programmes. Some of those that have played a vital role in its development are here with us today: the American and European Physical Societies; the Institute of Physics; the Japanese Society for the Promotion of Science; the Brazilian Synchrotron Light Source; Daresbury Laboratory in the UK; the US Department of Energy; the Cannon Foundation; and, of course, UNESCO's sister organization, the IAEA. The European Commission also provided financial support in 2006.

Of course, more substantial funding is required for the up-grading of the injector system and construction of the storage ring. I would therefore like to call on the European Commission as well as other donors, notably donor countries and organizations from the region, to provide support and take part in setting up a cutting-edge research laboratory in the Middle East.

I congratulate you all on the great progress we are witnessing today. I wish you continued success and assure you of UNESCO's continued commitment.

Thank you.