Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of the unveiling of the bronze statue of Sri Aurobindo, India

UNESCO, 16 September 2009

Madam Ambassador,
Mr Secretary of Education of the Government of India,
Dr Vatsayan, Member of the Executive Board,
Dr Singh, Chairman of the Auroville Foundation,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to join you this evening for the unveiling of this splendid statue of the great Indian philosopher, savant and spiritualist, Sri Aurobindo.

I am very honoured to welcome India’s Secretary for Education, Mr Rameshwar Pal Agrawal, to UNESCO, with whom I held very fruitful bilateral talks earlier today.

Let me also extend a very warm welcome to the Chairman of the Auroville Foundation, Dr Karan Singh. Thank you for travelling so far to be here today.

It is always a delight to share such special moments in the company of India’s representative to the Executive Board, Dr Kapila Vatsyayan. Indeed, I treasure fond memories of the moving ceremony held one year ago to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Auroville.

Finally, my profound thanks go to Madam Bhaswati Mukherjee, India’s energetic Ambassador and Permanent Delegate, for giving UNESCO the opportunity to pay permanent homage to Sri Aurobindo. I also want to acknowledge with gratitude her
dedication and commitment to the Organization’s work over the past five years, as well as the robust and incisive advice she has always offered me.

Your collective presence, and the installation of this statue at UNESCO’s Headquarters, are apt symbols of the strong cooperation between India and UNESCO in our work to build a more just and sustainable world.

Sri Aurobindo will forever be associated with the founding of Auroville, the unique international township founded in February 1968, as a place where people from different cultural, educational and political backgrounds could work together towards their common goal of human unity and sustainable living. It is an unparalleled experiment in transforming the ideals enshrined in UNESCO’s Constitution into reality, whose progress we have followed with interest and fascination. In parallel, we have placed ever increasing emphasis on dialogue, diversity and sustainable development as the means for everyone to achieve a more satisfactory and peaceful existence.

Dr Vatsyayan and other Members of the Executive Board have observed in recent days that the crises we are traversing at present are not only economic and financial, but moral, ethical, and spiritual. The teachings of Sri Aurobindo, and the model provided by Auroville, resonate particularly strongly as we search for long-term solutions. It is therefore very fitting that this monumental sculpture by a member of the Auroville community, Mr Lalit Verma, should find a home in this House of Dialogue.

Let me once again express my own, and UNESCO’s, deep appreciation to the Indian Government and people for their ongoing support for our work, and my delight in seeing this statue installed here today.

Thank you very much for your attention.