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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Koichiro Matsuura

Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the nomination of
Serhiy Bubka as UNESCO Champion for Sport

UNESCO, 4 November 2003

Mr Bubka,
Mr Minister,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you all to UNESCO Headquarters on this special occasion. We are here to honour a great athlete and to celebrate his joining the ranks of UNESCO Champions for Sport.

Mr Bubka, your sporting career has been truly outstanding and exceptional – as six times World Champion in the discipline of pole-vaulting; as gold medal winner at the 24th Olympic Games in Seoul, South Korea; as an athlete who set no less than 35 world records; and as someone who was recognized three times as World Sportsman of the Year.

Naturally, I had heard of you and your achievements before meeting you for the first time last May during the official visit to UNESCO of Mr Viktor Yanukovich, the Prime Minister of Ukraine. On that occasion, it became clear to me that you are a true supporter of UNESCO's aims, ideals and programmes. As you know, we are an international organization with a mandate to promote peace and development through our fields of competence: education, science, culture and communication. We are especially concerned to promote the rights of all children and young people so that they have an equal chance to fulfil their potential. I know that this is a sentiment close to your heart too.

Subsequent to our meeting, I discovered that you continue to hold the world records indoors and outdoors that you set respectively in 1993 and 1994. I also understand that you vaulted 20 feet or higher on no less than eleven occasions, and no one else has done it once. Mr Bubka, I know you are a quiet and reserved man but, frankly, your achievements have been rather loud.

In sum, you are a sportsman who has achieved a well-deserved fame all over the world and your accomplishments will be long remembered in the annals of sporting achievement. You have not only one of the most recognizable public faces in athletics but also one of the most respected. This is because you have promoted the most sacred values of sport – namely, competitive drive, the relentless pursuit of excellence and an abiding commitment to fair play. You have come to personify these qualities and, at the same time, you exhibit a natural modesty which does you great credit.

As a result, you have become a role model for young people everywhere, inspiring countless youngsters to follow in your footsteps. During this process, they learn to understand what the notion of fair play means, to achieve a healthy balance

of body and mind, to enjoy victory and accept defeat, and to respect rivals and fellow competitors. These are values, by the way, that are important for life, not just sport; they are the basis, in fact, of a peaceful and tolerant society.

You have continued your efforts in this direction through your membership in the Executive Committee of the International Olympic Committee and, most recently, through your election as Chairman of the IOC's Athletes' Commission. Two things should be noted in this regard: first, your active sense of responsibility towards the sport movement and, second, the high esteem in which you are held by your peers, your fellow sportsmen and sportswomen.

The IOC is a partner organization with which UNESCO shares common goals, working together to build a better, more peaceful world by educating youth through sport. We share the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding infused with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play. We share with the IOC the same love of opportunity for those with talent and those with enthusiasm, and we both oppose discrimination of any kind. And we share with the Olympic movement the desire to reduce the disparities in physical education and sport that exist between developed and developing countries. Our common goal is to ensure that as many people as possible enjoy the benefits of physical education and sport, undertaken in the spirit of the Olympic ideals.

It is in the best tradition of the Olympic ideals that you have initiated and supported various humanitarian activities focusing on centres, orphanages and boarding schools that promote sport and physical education. I draw special attention to the "Children Sports Club" which, for 13 years now, has trained around 300 youngsters under your guidance. In your native Ukraine, you have founded the Annual International Competition "The Pole Stars" aimed at contributing to social protection for disabled children and providing educational and sport opportunities for disadvantaged children.

Allow me on this occasion to stress the importance UNESCO attaches to sports and physical education as key dimensions of education as a whole as well as personal development in general. We believe that sporting activities are important for individual good health, active recreation, social participation, constructive teamwork and the application of ethical principles.

For these reasons, UNESCO is particularly concerned about the growth of doping, which is the antithesis of what sport should be really about. As you know, the international community has requested UNESCO to undertake the elaboration of an international convention against doping in sport and this was officially agreed at the 32nd session of the Organization's General Conference last month. We intend to move forward quickly on this matter but all the while through a consensual approach

that ensures that all significant bodies of opinion are taking into account. We shall therefore be working closely with the IOC, WADA, the Council of Europe, CIGEPS and other key partners. The cause of anti-doping in sport needs prominent figures like yourself to advocate in favour of sporting honesty and integrity. I hope that UNESCO can call upon your support in this effort as a sportsman whose reputation was never tainted by the scandal of doping.

You have accepted to join two other distinguished sport personalities, Formula One World Champion Michael Schumacher and Olympic Judo Champion David Douillet, and to lend your support to UNESCO's various programmes fighting poverty and promoting education through sports.

It is therefore with great pleasure to confer upon you the diploma of UNESCO Champion for Sport.

[Reading of Diploma]

I congratulate you for joining UNESCO's efforts to provide a brighter future to disadvantaged children the world over and wish you success in your new mission.