

June 5, 2001

Mr. Koichiro Matsuura
Director-General
UNESCO
7, Place de Fontenoy
75007 Paris
France

Dear Mr. Matsuura,

I am writing to formally propose that UNESCO, with the collaboration of the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information (NCLIS), the National Forum on Information Literacy (NFIL), and possibly other entities, co-sponsor and organize an International Leadership Conference on Information Literacy.

In a recent visit to UNESCO in May (agenda attached), I discussed this idea informally with one of your new, key senior officials, Sir John Daniel, and with various members of his Education Sector staff. Somewhat earlier, my staff had been in direct e-mail communication with Mr. Abdul Khan, and while in Paris I met with members of his Communication and Information Sector staff as well. We have assumed those officials represent the two key lead UNESCO sectors that would be involved, but perhaps you will direct that other elements of UNESCO staff also participate should you approve this proposal.

As you well know from your own professional and career interests and experience, *information literacy* means the skill to locate, retrieve, organize, understand, and utilize information. In short, it is not enough just to connect with, and learn how to use computers and networks (*computer literacy*). Certainly neither Mr. Khan, nor Sir John, nor you need to be told that both computer and information literacy are critical success factors in achieving political, economic, and socio-cultural development goals and objectives in the electronic Internet Age, especially in less developed countries.

Both Mr. Khan and Sir John enthusiastically endorse the idea of mounting such a conference, and suggested that I formally propose the conference to you as the next appropriate step. I have also been discussing the idea with Shirley M. Hart, the U.S. Observer to UNESCO, and with our Departments of State and Education people here in Washington, and with Hilary S. Wiesner of your staff.

We are in agreement with the suggestions of your people that there first be a smaller meeting of invited experts to plan the larger conference. As Sir John

suggested, perhaps that initial meeting could be held in early 2002. We would hope the larger conference could then be held before the end of 2002.

There are obviously many questions that need to be addressed in the areas of sponsorship, specific goals and themes, expected outcomes, the appropriate meeting formats for both the Expert Meeting and the larger meeting, budgetary and financing considerations, meeting venues, composition of the invited participants, and so forth. But it was my thought that I should first write to you to ensure that you approve the idea and then we can move forward together to address the other elements involved.

I want also to make the point that while the United States is making this proposal, we do not want the conference to be viewed as pre-eminently a U.S. event. That is precisely why we thought UNESCO would be a very appropriate and very effective organizational vehicle to ensure that the conference was truly international in scope, in purpose, and in participation. I know from your public writings and past communications with my Commission that you share the view that information literacy is a global challenge, which all nations, peoples, and cultures are facing. Therefore, the steps the world takes to address that challenge should be international in scope and character.

I am also attaching a *preliminary* conference proposal, which both Mr. Khan and Sir John, two of the world's distinguished leaders in distance learning and education, have already seen. They have both suggested that the expected outcomes be tightened, and, of course, we agree with them, and would work with your staff toward that end in a revision to this document.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Robert S. Willard
Executive Director

Cc: Mr. Abdul Khan, ADG/C&I Sector and Sir John Daniel, ADG/Education
Sector, UNESCO
Shirley S. Hart, U.S. Observer to UNESCO
Raymond Wanner, U.S. Department of State
Sam McKee, U.S. Department of Education
Patricia Breivik, National Forum on Information Literacy

