

**Remarks by Mr Desmond Fillis, Secretary General of the South African National Commission for UNESCO on 3 November 2009 at the start of the UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Curriculum for Teacher Education Training of Trainers' Workshop.**

On behalf of the South African National Commission for UNESCO I would like to extend a warm welcome to participants and at the same time express our gratitude to Professor Eloff and the University of Pretoria for hosting this event. I would also like to thank UNESCO for initiating this programme.

One of the main aims of UNESCO is to create peace in the minds of man (and women) while also providing the opportunity for all of us to enjoy and conduct our lives according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

As we are all aware, freedom of opinion and expression is a very important right as outlined in article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Our thinking around these issues therefore needs to be sensitized and guided in this regard, especially the minds of our young people need to be stimulated and engaged. This is why media and information literacy of a society becomes critical for optimum media development.

Media influences thought and fosters dialogue and understanding and if used successfully can be a powerful tool to bring about reconciliation. The outgoing Director-General in his message on Freedom Day earlier this year stressed that; "We must strengthen our efforts to build media that is critical of inherited assumptions yet tolerant of alternative perspectives; a media that brings competing narratives into a shared story of interdependence; a media that responds to diversity through dialogue."

This is obviously easier said than done. The Director-General in his address went on to say that respecting cultural differences while preserving freedom of expression will always exist as a tension to be debated and negotiated in any democracy.

Information and media literacy enables us to make informed judgments not only as users of information and media but also to become better at creating and producing information and media messages.

This workshop aims to facilitate the development of media literate societies by encouraging member states to develop national information and media literacy policies, including in education. To this end the relevant national government departments should be engaged in this initiative by UNESCO.

There is a particular focus with this initiative on training educators to sensitize them to the importance of information and media literacy in the education process, enabling them to integrate information and media literacy into their teaching and provide them with appropriate pedagogical methods and curricula.

I would like to stress and encourage the engagement with responsible government departments in this regard to elicit the necessary political will to successfully implement the envisaged pilot project. I refer here specifically to the national departments of education and communications.

The workshop will undoubtedly allow for deliberation on strategies of developing links between the pre-service, in-service training and the actual implementation of the programme at chalk-face level. Which I note will take place at secondary school level and at multimedia centres.

You would have noted in the media that the Minister of Basic Education made a recent announcement regarding a change in approach to the implementation of the curriculum next year as educators raised concerns about administrative overload that they are experiencing. Whatever strategy is suggested and adopted by this workshop and those to come, I am certain that the operational methodology suggested will be an educator- and learner-friendly one.

I am also very optimistic that the workshop will deliberate on how to package a curriculum that will allow for sufficient engagement with educators, with learners, with decision makers, with families, with communities and other stakeholders. It

would thus be important to engage all these stakeholders in dialogue during the construction and roll out of this initiative

And on that optimistic note, I take the opportunity of wishing you well with all your discussions and debates. May they be fruitful and the outcomes rewarding.

I thank you.