

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Koïchiro Matsuura

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

on the occasion of the presentation of two sculptures created by the Japanese artist
Ms Toshimi Ishii (“Toshi”) to UNESCO as trophies for the UNESCO/Madanjeet
Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-violence and for the UNESCO
Prize for Human Rights Education

UNESCO, 25 February 2003

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Toshi,

I am very pleased to be with you here today for the presentation to UNESCO of the trophies for the UNESCO/Madanjeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-violence, and the UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education. Thank you for attending this ceremony.

I warmly welcome the Japanese artist, Ms Toshimi Ishii, known as “Toshi”, who created the two bronze sculptures as a gesture of goodwill and decided to offer the originals of each trophy as a gift to UNESCO. These originals will be kept in the Organization while their copies will be given to the laureates of the two Prizes.

For myself, this is a very moving event, for it gives me the opportunity to acknowledge the outstanding talent and creative work of my compatriot, whom I first came to know when Japanese Ambassador to France some years ago. Toshi was born in Fukuoka City, which served in ancient times as the gateway for the introduction into Japan of other Asian cultures from the mainland. I am convinced that the natural beauty of her motherland and the world’s rich and diverse cultures have inspired Toshi with a fascination concerning the origins of the world and have filled her work with ‘poetic optimism’, as was noted by Maurice Calka, one of her teachers.

Art knows no borders. Toshi has traveled far and wide during her life. Following her studies of music, dance and the fine arts in Tokyo, she undertook a long voyage around Europe and other parts of the world. Her Paris studio, in an old atelier in Montparnasse, has become her true home. She also lived for many years in New York, where her work was exhibited at the World Trade Centre, as well as in Mexico. In Senegal, she was drawn to the culture of Africa, which inspired her “Baobab of Life” (winner of the 1st Prize at the Dakar Biennial in 1992). Toshi's talent has taken on an international dimension. Her dream is to help people become conscious of their own creative powers, which they can then use to find their own “way”.

I hereby offer my heart-felt thanks to Toshi for her remarkable contribution to UNESCO and its mandate to promote universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for human rights and fundamental freedoms for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion. I know that I speak for

everyone present here today when I thank Toshi for associating her artistic talent with UNESCO's work to promote tolerance and solidarity among all peoples, based on the recognition of cultural diversity and awareness of the fundamental unity of humankind.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The UNESCO/Madanjeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-violence was instituted in 1995, on the occasion of the United Nations Year for Tolerance and the 125th anniversary of the birth of Mahatma Gandhi, thanks to the donation of Mr Madanjeet Singh, an Indian writer and diplomat who is also a UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador. The US\$100,000 Prize is awarded every two years to an individual or institution for exceptional contributions to advancing the spirit of tolerance, non-violence and peace in the arts, education, culture, science and communication.

The winner of the UNESCO/Madanjeet Singh Prize for 2002 was Ms Aung San Suu Kyi from Myanmar, who was thereby honoured for her efforts to establish democracy in her country. An international symbol of personal courage and peaceful resistance to oppression, she is still pursuing her non-violent struggle for democracy and tolerance in Myanmar.

The UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education, awarded every two years, was created in 1978 to mark the 30th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It aims to encourage and honour institutions, organizations or individuals for substantially furthering human rights education.

The laureate of the 2002 UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education is the Mexican Academy of Human Rights (*Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos*), in recognition of its outstanding and exemplary contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights at both national and regional levels through education and the mobilization of public opinion. The prize will be awarded in Mexico City on 6 March 2003, at an official ceremony organized with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Relations of Mexico and the UNESCO Office in Mexico.

I am sure that the laureates of the UNESCO/Madanjeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-violence and the UNESCO Prize for Human Rights Education will recognize the spiritual energy embodied in these sculptures, which are being awarded for the first time. Allow me, therefore, once again to express my appreciation both of Toshi's art and her generosity of spirit. These two

creative works recognize the eternal values of human dignity, tolerance, respect for diversity, justice and liberty. On behalf of myself and UNESCO, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Ms Toshimi Ishii for making possible this association of culture, imagination and creativity with the noble values which are the basis of these two Prizes.

Thank you.