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Organización  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Getachew Engida,  
Deputy Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of opening session of the Meeting of  
experts on the elaboration of a ninth volume of the *General  
History of Africa***

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 20 May 2013**

Excellency Mr Mulugeta Said, State Minister of Culture and Tourism, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Excellency Mr Erastus Mwencha, Deputy Chairperson of the *African Union Commission*

Excellency Mrs Isabel Cristina de Azevedo Heyvaert, Ambassador of the Federative Republic of Brazil

Professor Elikia M'Bokolo, Chair of the Scientific Committee for the *Pedagogical Use of the General History of Africa*,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured to take part in this Experts' Meeting devoted to the 9<sup>th</sup> Volume of the *General History of Africa*.

Of course, it is a special pleasure for me to be here, on this occasion, in Addis Ababa.

I wish to thank Ethiopia for its engagement and support.

Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to Brazil's commitment to the *General History of Africa* initiative.

UNESCO is grateful to the Government of Brazil for generously providing the financial support required for drafting and publishing this new volume and for serving on the International Scientific Committee.

Let me commend the Brazilian Government for adopting legislation to make the teaching of African history compulsory at all levels of education.

The Government of Brazil has overseen the translation of the eight volumes of the *General History of Africa* into Portuguese and the development of related pedagogical materials.

We are all grateful to the many Brazilian scholars who have contributed to this project over the years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The *General History of Africa* is a UNESCO flagship.

If I may add a personal note, this is one of the projects that makes me most proud of the Organization.

Through the perspective of one continent, over a time period spanning three million years, this project is a history of ideas, a history of traditions, a history of cultures – it tells a story that is rich in diversity and boundless in experience.

The *General History of Africa* is the first truly international and multidisciplinary history of the continent.

This is not 'history' in the singular – it tells many histories, from a variety of points of views, thanks to many different voices.

Initiated in 1964, this vast undertaking, this adventure – no word seems strong enough to capture the spirit of the project -- has spanned nearly five decades already...

The original impetus was to respond to the aspirations of the newly independent African States to decolonize and reclaim their history.

The idea remains valid today – to reveal and preserve the history, the traditions and cultures of Africa and to share these with the world, highlighting the contribution of African peoples to humanity as a whole.

This collection is one of UNESCO's greatest ambitions – it stands today as one of the Organization's finest achievements, in its efforts to deepen respect and mutual understanding between peoples.

As you know, upon the completion of the *General History of Africa*, African stakeholders made numerous recommendations to promote, to disseminate and to update the collection.

UNESCO launched the second phase of the project in 2009 -- the *Pedagogical use of the General History of Africa*, in order to renovate history education, in the framework of the *Second Decade of Education for Africa (2006 - 2015)* declared by the African Union.

The updated collection will take into account the latest advances in methodology and historiography, as well as major socio-political, economic, cultural and environmental changes that have impacted Africa and African Diaspora since the 1990s.

These include the emergence of new States, the creation of the African Union, the opening of the apartheid archives.

They encompass recent archaeological excavations and discoveries, as well as civil unrest and conflict in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia.

Undertaken jointly by UNESCO and the African Union, under the responsibility of a new Scientific Committee composed of African history and education experts, the project has made considerable progress – indeed, it has been praised by the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union and the African Union Commission for its unique contribution to regional integration and African unity.

In 2009, the African Union Summit in Syrte, Libya called upon African Union Member States to assist in drafting a 9<sup>th</sup> volume of the *General History of Africa*, covering the recent history since decolonization, the end of apartheid and the rising place of Africa in the world.

This is where we stand today...

The world has changed dramatically since 1964.

Africa is not the same.

Education has also changed, as has the world of publishing, under the influence of a revolution in information and communication technologies.

This is why this Experts' Meeting is so important.

It is not an exaggeration to say your task will be decisive for the future of African history education.

You are called upon to draw up guidelines for the elaboration of a 9<sup>th</sup> volume of the *General History of Africa*.

For this, you will have to consider recent developments in scientific research and contributions to the knowledge of Africa and African Diaspora.

You will have to identify key events that occurred in Africa since 1990s and highlight new threats and opportunities arising across the continent.

You will have to revisit accepted wisdom, even the very concept of 'African Diasporas,' and you will have to determine the key challenges people of African descent face today.

These are difficult tasks, I know, but this is the right time and the right place for this...in Addis Ababa, capital of the African Union, as we gather to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the creation of the *Organization of African Unity*....

I wish to thank you all for your determination to tackle these challenges together.

Let me take this opportunity to call on all African Union Member States to back, with all their might, the second phase of the *General History of Africa*.

This is Africa's project – and it is for the world's benefit.

I wish you fruitful deliberations and look forward to their outcome.