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**UNESCO and Microsoft Announce Higher Education ICT Task Force for Long-Term Skills and Sustainable Development**

*Collaboration to promote greater access and use of ICT for higher education enhancements.*

**PARIS — July 6, 2009 —** The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Microsoft Corp. today announced a joint task force to help higher education institutions worldwide meet the growing challenge of supporting economic stimulus efforts and work-force development strategies. The UNESCO-Microsoft Task Force on Higher Education and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) will create a strategic plan of action to identify how ICT can be used by governments as a catalyst for change.

The announcement was made at the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE), which opened today and is being attended by close to 100 ministers of education, senior education officials and policy advisors. The WCHE is also focusing on critical issues around reduced funding for education globally as a result of the economic crisis and the need for governments to find affordable measures for short-term skills training and work force enhancement in support of economic recovery and growth. Many delegations in attendance from developing regions emphasized the longer-term challenges of sustainable higher education reform and capacity-building.

The UNESCO-Microsoft Task Force on Higher Education and ICT will analyze the findings and recommendations of the WCHE, in addition to feedback from global higher education experts and stakeholders, to identify key initiatives that will promote more effective use of ICT in post-secondary teaching, learning and research.

“Higher education is increasingly strategic for building up skilled work forces in countries. Our focus has been on ensuring that tertiary institutions address the key long-term requirements of our increasingly knowledge-based societies and that students today are best equipped to drive and support economic growth and to address major development challenges from education to health to the environment,” said Nicholas Burnett, UNESCO assistant director-general for education. “Through the creation of the UNESCO-Microsoft Task Force on Higher Education and ICT we will help mobilize critical strategic resources to better assist ministries of education worldwide.”

**Initial ICT Resource Mobilization**

The current economic downturn combined with rising demand for higher education places governments under enormous pressure to fund enhancements in higher education and support programs needed to train the next generation of work forces with the new skills necessary for economic recovery. Under the umbrella of the UNESCO-Microsoft Task Force on Higher Education and ICT and through the Microsoft Education Alliance , Microsoft will provide a tailored package of resources for short-term higher education enhancements, including curriculum, training and affordable access to collaboration and development software.

“We believe that technology has a vital role to play in building up 21st-century skills, broadening access to education and personalizing the learning experience to adapt teaching to the unique needs of each learner,” said Michael Golden, corporate vice president, Education Products Group at Microsoft. “This program makes technology resources more accessible than ever before to governments and students across the world. We will continue to support UNESCO and our newly formed UNESCO-Microsoft Task Force on Higher Education and ICT in every way we can.”

Additional information about the Microsoft resources available can be found at <http://www.microsoft.com/education/ELF09.aspx>.

**About UNESCO**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the UN agency responsible for the promotion of international cooperation in the fields of education, science, culture and communication. UNESCO functions as a laboratory of ideas and standard setter to forge universal agreements on emerging development and ethical issues. It also serves as a clearinghouse for the dissemination and sharing of information and knowledge, while helping member states to build their human and institutional capacities.

**About Unlimited Potential**

Microsoft, through its Unlimited Potential vision, is committed to making technology more affordable, relevant and accessible for the 5 billion people around the world who do not yet enjoy its benefits. The company aims to do so by helping to transform education and foster a culture of innovation, and through these means enable better jobs and opportunities. By working with governments, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations and industry partners, Microsoft hopes to reach its first major milestone — to reach the next 1 billion people who are not yet realizing the benefits of technology — by 2015.

**About Microsoft**

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq “MSFT”) is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realize their full potential.

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