Address by Mr Getachew Engida, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of the reception dedicated to the Winter Olympic Games in Sochi

UNESCO, 6 February 2014

Excellency Ms Eleonora Mitrofanova, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Russian Federation to UNESCO,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Director-General, Ms Irina Bokova, I am very pleased to greet you all this evening – for this moment of celebration dedicated to the 22nd Winter Olympic Games, held in Sochi.

UNESCO’s mandate is to build the defences of peace in the minds of men and women -- the world has changed dramatically since 1945, but this mandate has never been so relevant.

At the heart of our mission lies the need to cultivate positive forms of human expression and endeavour, and we are gathered now
to explore one of the most essential forms of human expression – that is sport.

UNESCO’s position is clear.

We believe sport can bring people and cultures together around shared values, around fair play.

We believe in sport as an essential part in the struggle for tolerance and against racism.

We believe in sport and physical education as essential to young people, to healthy lives, to resilient societies, to the fight against violence.

In sum, sport can be a powerful vehicle for social inclusion, for gender equality, for youth empowerment...

The Olympic Games and the Olympic spirit are important in every respect here.

By bringing together athletes from all parts of the world, the Games seek to promote peace and deepen mutual understanding.

This is true for the athletes who take the Olympic oath – it is also true more widely, through the Olympic Truce, which remains a hallowed principle of the Olympic Games.
In October 1993, the United Nations General Assembly approved a Resolution urging Member States to observe the *Olympic Truce* from the seventh day before the opening to the seventh day following the closing of each Olympic Games.

The Games have also tremendous educational value, which stands at the core of UNESCO’s mandate in the field of anti-doping.

We are guided here by the 1978 *International Charter for Physical Education and Sport* as well as the 2005 *International Convention against Doping in Sport*, that today counts 176 States Parties.

Through this framework, UNESCO seeks to harness the power of sport by acting across all our fields of work – by developing innovative approaches to education, by fostering intercultural dialogue, by promoting gender equality, by working to engage marginalized groups on a common playing field.

Sport is especially important for young women and men – as an entry point for their participation in public, political and community life – through volunteering, through competition, through spectatorship.

By its very nature, sport is about participation and leadership -- it is about engagement, discipline and commitment.

These are vital values for strengthening the social fabric, for deepening social cohesion.
The 5th UNESCO World Sports Ministers Conference – MINEPS V – held last May in Berlin was a moment to raise the flag for these values and to mobilise Governments around these messages.

Indeed, the Berlin Declaration reaffirmed that every single woman and man must have the opportunity to access and participate in sport as a fundamental right.

So, tomorrow, as we will watch the opening of the Sochi Games, we will stand with athletes from across the world in defence of these principles and this spirit.

The Russian Federation is an important partner for UNESCO in all this work.

In 1976, Moscow hosted the first World Sport Ministers Conference – MINEPS I.

The Russian Federation is a member of UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Committee for Physical Education and Sport, and the key contributor to the Anti-Doping Fund, through which UNESCO has supported over 90 national and regional projects.

In the Olympic spirit, I wish to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Mitrofanova for this champion support to UNESCO.
I wish the Russian Federation very successful Games, embodying the values of peace, respect and mutual understanding at the heart of sport.

Most especially, I wish good luck to every athlete – may the best woman or man win and inspire us all!