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联合国教育、
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**Video address by Audrey Azoulay,
the Director-General of UNESCO,
for the inauguration of the International Research Centre
on Artificial Intelligence (IRCAI)**

29 March 2021

Your Excellency, Mr President of the Republic of Slovenia,

Dear ministers,

Professor Boštjan Zalar, Director of the Jožef Štefan Institute,

Professor John Shawe-Taylor, Director of IRCAI

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Dears friends from all around the world,

Dober dan.

It is a pleasure to be with you today for this virtual launch.

Of course, I would have preferred to be with you in Ljubljana to visit once again its vibrant streets and its beautiful Prešeren square.

But as you know, the circumstances and the new instructions in Europe made it impossible for me to be with you.

Regardless, I am very happy to be with you to celebrate this event, as we welcome a very important new member to the UNESCO family.

IRCAI is now officially one of UNESCO's Category 2 Centres.

In other words, IRCAI has become a place that not only devotes academic and human resources to scientific research on a subject within UNESCO's mandate, which, as you know, covers education, culture, the sciences and information. It has

also become a place devoted to sharing this knowledge with the international community.

UNESCO has more than a hundred such centres, where knowledge is produced and shared with the international community.

However, to date, none of them have dealt specifically with the issue of artificial intelligence.

Thanks to IRCAI, we now have the support of an entire team, that I would like to thank, who are mobilizing their diverse skills to make the most of artificial intelligence, by ensuring it serves the common good.

This team, dear Professor Shawe-Taylor, fosters and shares relevant progress in research – for education, culture, information and the protection of the planet.

It provides resources and training to our Member States, to ensure that artificial intelligence realizes its potential everywhere.

The team identifies good practices for the development of AI, to avoid reproducing the flaws in our societies.

And we are very fortunate to have an ally like this, to help make our ambitions reality. And I thank you – Mr President, honourable ministers – for Slovenia's commitment at our side.

The importance of IRCAI has become clear over the past six months, as the Centre has made decisive contributions to a new standard-setting instrument being prepared by UNESCO on the ethics of artificial intelligence.

We have drafted a text underlining the need to develop AI in a way that respects our values and our rights.

A text that addresses the social and gender biases sometimes embedded in algorithms.

The Centre joined forces with us last July, by leading a regional consultation of 17 countries on the first draft of this text, and analysing contributions.

This was a huge task, for which I wished to thank all the team in person.

The draft Recommendation has now been finalized, and it will be discussed by the representatives of our Member States, who are gathering in spring for this purpose.

If adopted at UNESCO's General Conference in November, this text will become the first global standard-setting instrument on the ethics of artificial intelligence.

But our work together does not end with this Recommendation.

It also involves harnessing the incredible potential of AI for the benefit of our actions and goals.

We work together to use artificial intelligence to support, for instance, linguistic diversity in Africa.

In all of our fields of action, artificial intelligence has great potential – in water management, in journalism, in artistic creation, to name just a few.

However, this is provided we use it with the right knowledge and critical perspective, and a robust ethical framework.

Provided also that more women are involved in shaping this revolution, because today women only account for 12% of all researchers in this field.

That is why, on International Women's Day this year, and in cooperation with the World Economic Forum, we hosted an online discussion to address the female recruitment crisis in AI, building on our priority for women in science.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

In our work together to date, we have already been able to glimpse the potential of this partnership. This inauguration is therefore full of promise.

Both a confirmation of Slovenia's excellence in this area and a promise for innovation and international cooperation.

And unlike the words of famous poem by France Prešeren, which says that "the person sowing the grain never knows if it will germinate", I think that we all know that the work we do here will be fruitful.

Hvala.