Greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning

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Greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning, Remarks at the Opening Ceremony

by Sir John Daniel, President & CEO
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Transcript

It is a great pleasure to be in Sierra Leone and to bring you greetings from the Commonwealth of Learning. With the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Foundation the Commonwealth of Learning, or COL, is the third of the trio of intergovernmental agencies that serve the 53 nations of the Commonwealth.

COL was established by the Commonwealth Heads of Government in 1988. Whilst the Secretariat and the Foundation are based in London, COL is based in Vancouver, Canada. And where the Secretariat and the Foundation have rather broad mandates, the Commonwealth of Learning exists solely to help the developing countries of the Commonwealth make judicious use of various kinds of technology to expand the scale, scope and impact of education, training and learning generally.

In doing this COL works to the agendas of the Ministers of Education and we collaborate closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat and other intergovernmental bodies such as UNESCO and the World Health Organisation. I am delighted to say that our work with the Commonwealth Secretariat is developing strongly. Here I pay tribute to Deputy Secretary-General Winston Cox, who has been a constant supporter and friend of COL and to Ann Keeling, the new Director of the Social Transformation Programmes Division, who is giving fresh inspiration and direction to our collaborative endeavours.

My COL colleagues, Asha Kanwar from India, Joshua Mallet from Ghana, and David Walker from Canada, who are here with me, are delighted to be working hand in glove with their Secretariat colleagues to support this important ministerial meeting. I realised how fruitful these CCEM Mid-Term review meetings were when I attended the event for the Caribbean in July, so I have brought reinforcements with me this time!

Before coming to COL last year I was Assistant Director-General for Education at UNESCO. If you
allow me to count the visits that I made in my last year at UNESCO as well as my travels during my first year at COL, I am proud to say that I have been to all but three of the Commonwealth countries of Africa in the last two years. In the course of those visits, and in other meetings, I have been privileged to meet most of the honourable Ministers of Education who are here and many of their predecessors. My colleagues and I look forward to renewing our dialogue with you.

While we are here we shall also be paying close attention to COL’s activities in Sierra Leone, where we are particularly proud of our involvement with the West African Teacher Education Consortium through the Freetown Teachers' College, of our work on the prevention of HIV/AIDS through Media Empowerment, and of our support to the Honourable Minister, Alpha Wurie, on developing policies, systems and applications for technology-mediated learning in Sierra Leone. It is a pleasure to acknowledge the Minister's strong commitment to the use of open and distance learning in the renaissance of education and training in this country.

In this Sierra Leone is part of an Africa-wide trend. As the Commonwealth of Learning approaches its 20th anniversary it is clear that the Heads of Government were right when, back in 1987, they underlined the great importance of using technology to enhance learning and set up COL. Recent years have seen a rapid rise in the number of African countries that have put in place policies and systems for the application of educational technologies. We look forward to pursuing discussions about those policies and systems here in Freetown this week.

I join my Secretariat colleagues and all of you in gratitude to Sierra Leone for its warm hospitality and I thank you for this opportunity to bring greetings.