

**SPEECH BY THE PRESIDENT, WORLD FEDERATION OF ENGINEERING ORGANIZATIONS, (WFEO), ENG. MUSTAFA SHEHU, BEING REPRESENTED BY ENG. NATHANIEL MATALANGA, AT THE 2024 WORLD CONFERENCE ON SCIENCE LITERACY, HELD IN BEIJING, PEOPLES REPUBLIC OF CHINA, 5-6 DECEMBER 2024.**

Good morning,

Distinguished delegates, esteemed colleagues, honoured guests, friends from around the globe and ladies and gentlemen,

I am Nathaniel Matalanga, from Kenya. An Executive Council member of WFEO and here representing WFEO President, Eng. Mustafa Shehu. Please receive his greetings. He would have loved to be here but had other engagements which he could not delegate.

It is therefore a profound honour for me to stand before you today, as we open this important conference, aptly themed ***“Enhance Science Literacy, Empower Joint Development.”*** I am humbled to have the privilege to address the Opening Ceremony of this important event.

The theme of this conference is both timely and essential. We gather in an era where science and technology shape every facet of our lives — from how we communicate to how we address the complex challenges of our time. Yet, the potential of science remains unrealized for many, constrained by barriers of access, understanding, and opportunity. Through this conference, we seek to dismantle those barriers through the power of exchange.

This conference is particularly important at this time when the United Nations has declared 2024-2033 as the International Decade of Science for Sustainable Development (IDSSD) and charged UNESCO to drive its implementation. The Decade is a natural extension of the International Year of Basic Sciences for Sustainable Development, although its scope is much wider. Whereas the Year focused on raising the profile of the basic sciences by explaining the link between a breakthrough in the laboratory and applications which may only find their way into our daily lives, decades later, the Decade will be harnessing all of the sciences – basic, applied, social and human – to bring about transformative change to our societies, economies and environment. WFEO being part of the Executive Committee to see to the implementation of the Decade will be very much interested in the outcome of this Conference.

## ***Enhancing Science Literacy***

We commend China for the great progress made in this area. We believe this is a result of the deliberate effort the country has made in ensuring that the leadership is selected from people with Science Literacy.

**Science literacy** is more than just knowledge; it is the capacity to **think critically, question boldly, and engage thoughtfully with the evidence before one**. It is a skill that empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their health, their environment, and their communities. It is a tool that enables societies to innovate and adapt in the face of uncertainty.

Globally and indeed for all developing regions, **enhancing science literacy** is a cornerstone of progress. It means ensuring that a child in a remote village in **Africa** for example is given the same opportunity to understand the wonders of the world like a child in the world's most advanced cities like **Beijing**. It means empowering young women to pursue careers in **STEM** fields, breaking the cycles of inequality that have held back too many for too long. It means equipping every citizen with the ability to navigate the **flood of information—and misinformation**—that shapes our world.

## ***Empowering Joint Development***

The second pillar of the theme, **empowering joint development**, reminds us that no nation, no continent, and no community, can advance in isolation. The challenges we face—climate change, pandemics, food insecurity, and digital divides—are global in nature and require global solutions.

Through exchanges of knowledge, resources, and ideas, we can foster partnerships that transcend borders. Youths, for example, are a wellspring of creativity and resilience, eager to contribute to the world stage. By investing in collaborative platforms, by sharing expertise and technology, we create the conditions for all nations to rise together. Joint development is not merely a strategy; it is a moral imperative. This is necessary for every one of us.

## ***The Role of Exchange***

The concept of **exchange** lies at the heart of this conference. It is in the dialogues we hold, the innovations we share, and the mutual respect we cultivate. Exchanges are the bridges that connect diverse perspectives, allowing us to learn from each other and to grow together.

For centuries, the continent of Africa has been a land of exchange, a crossroads of cultures, ideas, and traditions. Today, we should continue that legacy by making it contribute to the global dialogue on science and development. From groundbreaking research in renewable energy to community-driven solutions for public health, Africa demonstrates that local knowledge has global value. And so, I encourage all of us here to embrace the spirit of exchange, recognizing that every voice enriches our collective wisdom.

### ***A Shared Vision***

As we embark on this conference, let us hold steadfast to a **shared vision: a world where science literacy is not a privilege but a right**; where collaboration is the norm, not the exception; and where every innovation serves the greater good. Let us dream boldly and act decisively, knowing that the work we begin here will spread outward, touching lives, and transforming futures.

I am confident that over the next two days, we will engage in fruitful discussions, forge meaningful partnerships, and lay the groundwork for a new era of collaboration and progress. Together, we will turn aspirations into action and action into impact.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this distinguished gathering. Let us move forward together with purpose, unity, and the unwavering belief that our exchanges here today will shape a better tomorrow for all.

Let me end by reminding us of an African Saying:

***“If you want to go FAST go alone, if you want to go FAR go together.”***

Thank you.