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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion
of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People**

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Indigenous knowledge systems represent an invaluable and irreplaceable resource and a critical component of sustainable development. The worldviews of most indigenous peoples, which recognize the inextricable links between culture and nature, clearly resonate with UNESCO's efforts to protect and promote cultural as well as biological diversity. This is a matter of growing concern to many indigenous communities around the world and constitutes the essence of their recent call for "development with identity".

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People provides an excellent opportunity for the international community to reflect on indigenous peoples' perspectives and aspirations, especially on how they relate to the sustainable development of our planet.

Safeguarding intangible heritage, particularly through the transmission of indigenous knowledge systems and cultural expressions, is inextricably linked to issues of land use, natural resource management and tangible heritage conservation. This has been recognized by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, which devoted this year's session in May to the theme of indigenous communities' rights to "lands, territories and natural resources" – a contentious issue with far-reaching economic and social implications. The various activities spearheaded by UNESCO in areas of cultural landscapes, sacred sites, water, and participatory mapping of indigenous cultural resources reflect the Organization's concern for this timely question. Moreover, to date, more than 55 "cultural landscapes" from some 35 countries are inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

However, UNESCO's most unique contribution towards enhancing the worldwide visibility of indigenous issues lies in its standard-setting activity. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, adopted in 2001, specifically refers to the rights of indigenous peoples (Article 4), and the Declaration's action plan calls for "respecting and protecting traditional knowledge, in particular that of indigenous peoples"; and "recognizing [its] contribution, particularly with regard to environmental protection and the management of natural resources, and fostering synergies between modern science and local knowledge".

UNESCO Member States have subsequently adopted two legally binding international treaties, which likewise promise to have a positive impact for indigenous peoples. The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which entered into force in April 2006, bears particular significance on this International Day. The Convention's preamble reminds us not only that intangible cultural heritage is a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development, but specifically refers to the important role of the world's indigenous communities in the production, safeguarding, maintenance and re-creation of intangible cultural heritage. We are very pleased by the progress made over the past year by the first sessions of the governing bodies of the Convention – the General Assembly of the States Parties and the Intergovernmental Committee – in the preparation of the complex operational guidelines that will bring this important treaty into practical operation.

Regarding the second normative instrument, the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, another landmark has been achieved with the convention's entry into force in March of this year. Indeed, this event fulfils item 14 of the Programme of Action for the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (2005-2014), which encourages all relevant actors to work towards the adoption and ratification by States of the convention "to ensure the right of indigenous peoples to create and disseminate in a fair environment their cultural goods and services, and their traditional expressions, so that they might benefit from them in the future". The Conference of Parties, the supreme body of the Convention, convened for the first time in June of this year, and the Intergovernmental Committee this December, will begin drawing up the operational guidelines designed to ensure the most efficient implementation of the treaty.

It is worth recalling that these two instruments, together with the well-known World Heritage Convention of 1972, constitute the foundation of UNESCO's legal framework to safeguard all aspects of cultural diversity.

UNESCO also attributes great importance to promoting multilingualism and protecting endangered languages, a fundamental issue for most indigenous communities. At present, the number of indigenous peoples in the world is estimated at between 300 and 350 million individuals, representing approximately 5 per cent of the total world population. Yet, they account for more than 5,000 languages in over 70 countries on six continents; that is, nearly 75 per cent of all languages believed to exist.

Indigenous languages serve to transmit cultural systems and express world views, identities and specific characteristics of entire communities. In addition, they convey irreplaceable traditions, knowledge, and know-how. However, their survival is coming under increasing threat in the twenty-first century owing to various processes linked to modern lifestyles as well as insufficient support for their protection and promotion. Experts tell us that over half of all languages are endangered in today's increasingly globalized world.

In its efforts to protect endangered languages, UNESCO has launched numerous noteworthy initiatives, such as the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger of Disappearing, the 2003 Recommendation concerning the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace. More recently, several sectors within UNESCO have coordinated language-related programmes culminating in the Organization's new intersectoral strategy to promote linguistic diversity. Finally, the Convention of 2003 recognizes the essential role of language in the expression and transmission of intangible heritage, while the 2005 Convention considers linguistic diversity a fundamental element of cultural diversity.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude to UNESCO Member States, indigenous peoples' organizations and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for their increasingly dynamic collaboration at this early stage of the Second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People. I encourage them to continue working hand in hand with UNESCO to successfully mainstream principles of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in all development policies and programmes for sustainable development. Such efforts are essential to achieving

the objectives of the Second Decade and making the proclaimed vision of “development with identity” a reality.

Koïchiro Matsuura