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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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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 World Book and Copyright Day**

23 April 2008

Since 23 April 1996, World Book and Copyright Day has brought together millions of people in more than 100 countries in both the South and North in the solemn celebration of the many functions of the book in the life of human society. It has also invited them to reflect on the place of copyright in connection with books.

In 2008, this event offers a new opportunity for political decision-makers, economic agents and those active in civil society to give pride of place, each in their own field, to this unique instrument of culture, education, participation, communication and entertainment – the book.

Books contribute to shaping and maintaining the educational, cultural and economic fabric of our societies, and play multiple and fundamental roles in it.

These works of the mind protected by copyright, which enrich the intangible heritage of humanity, are also merchandise, a duality that has been highlighted and analysed on many occasions. Books are thus the pivot in a vast chain of income-generating activities and professions, and an important component of economic development.

The proclamation by the United Nations General Assembly of 2008 as International Year of Languages invites us moreover to reconsider another dimension of books which complements those mentioned above: the linguistic dimension of publishing.

Books are in fact a means of expression which live through language and in language. Every book is written, produced, exchanged, used and appreciated in a specific linguistic framework. When selecting their language, authors are also selecting their readers, who should be able to understand what they write. Translation helps to build linguistic bridges leading to new books and new readers.

When a language has no access to the world of publishing, it is excluded – together with those who speak it – from a significant part of the intellectual life and economic activity of society. Hence the importance of developing multilingualism through translation.

At a time when the proclamation of International Year of Languages has brought the matter of languages and multilingualism to the top of the international agenda, it is more essential than ever to reflect on the future of books as vehicles for expression and linguistic recognition.

In this context, it is then a matter of urgency to give languages broader access to publishing, so as to promote the exchange of books and editorial content, and thus “the free flow of ideas by word and image” enshrined in the Constitution of UNESCO.

On this thirteenth World Book and Copyright Day, I solemnly call upon all the Member States, partners and friends of UNESCO to join us in reflection and action to ensure that the place of books and reading receives full recognition for the benefit of a world that can claim to be genuinely multilingual, even in practice.