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Organización
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the centenary
of the birth of Ebrahim Al-Arrayed**

UNESCO, 23 June 2008

Shaikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al-Khalifa,
Mr Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain,
Madam Soraya Al-Arrayed,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to UNESCO Headquarters today to commemorate the illustrious poet Ebrahim Al-Arrayed on the centenary of his birth.

Allow me first to thank Shaikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al-Khalifa, President of the Board of the Sheikh Ebrahim bin Mohammed Al Khalifa Centre for Culture and Research, as well as Dr Hashim Hasan Albash, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to France and its Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, for organizing this impressive exhibition about the poet's life and work.

Mr Ambassador, I should like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to your country for co-hosting a very important UNESCO meeting on youth issues held last week in Manama, Bahrain.

I should also like to express a particularly warm welcome to the late poet's daughter, Madam Soraya Al-Arrayed. Thank you for travelling to be with us today.

UNESCO is always pleased to celebrate the anniversaries of eminent personalities in the Organization's fields of competence. They contribute to our work to promote mutual understanding among different peoples, and also provide an excellent

opportunity to spotlight the cultural diversity that UNESCO endeavours to safeguard through its worldwide activities and standard-setting action.

Today, UNESCO is delighted to join the authorities of the Kingdom of Bahrain in paying tribute to Ebrahim Al Arrayed, the country's most popular twentieth-century poet.

Born and educated in India and fluent not only in Arabic but also in Hindi, Farsi, Urdu and English, Al Arrayed embodied the multiculturalism that has characterized Bahrain in the course of its long and rich history. Through his own writing in Arabic and his numerous translations of literary works in the other languages he mastered, Al Arrayed contributed significantly to the dissemination of knowledge and enhancement of intercultural dialogue throughout the region.

It is fitting that the centenary of this distinguished polyglot coincides with the International Year of Languages, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly to promote linguistic diversity and multilingualism. Named lead agency for the International Year, UNESCO believes that languages are both essential to human identity and important factors towards social progress and sustainable development.

The Government of Bahrain's support for the preservation of linguistic and literary heritage is demonstrated by its decision to transform the writer's former home in the Gudaibiya district of Manama into the Ebrahim Al-Arrayed Poetry House. Open to the public since 2006, this museum displays original manuscripts and Al-Arrayed's personal effects.

However, the Poetry House serves a greater purpose beyond that of preserving the literary works and the memory of the late poet. Over the last two years, it has become a vibrant cultural centre and a striking symbol of the Kingdom's innovative and forward-looking cultural policies.

Indeed, these policies have established Bahrain as the region's leading book publisher and the venue for several major annual events such as the Bahrain International Book Fair and the Conference for Young Arab Poets to name but two. UNESCO commends the Kingdom of Bahrain for its active support for publishing,

literature, heritage and contemporary creation, and its contribution to the exciting cultural renaissance currently underway in the Gulf region.

UNESCO looks forward to pursuing its fruitful collaboration with the Bahraini authorities not only in culture but all its fields of competence, as part of our collective efforts to create a sustainable world for this and future generations.

In closing, allow me to wish you a pleasant afternoon and thank you for your attention.