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Организация
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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 for Tolerance**

16 November 2008

Every year, on 16 November, International Day for Tolerance focuses global attention on what has been achieved and, above all, what remains to be done to promote the values of tolerance, in particular for the benefit of the most vulnerable and marginalized communities.

This year, as we celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this Day of collective reflection takes on particular significance by highlighting the importance of tolerance for the exercise of each and every one of the basic rights and freedoms that define our common humanity.

The tireless battles to promote and protect human rights have taught us that they can only be fully realized in an environment imbued with a culture of tolerance. How can a political dissident express freely his or her opinion and join a likeminded association; how can a member of a religious minority profess without interference his or her beliefs; how can a member of an indigenous group freely participate in the cultural life of his or her community – how can these fundamental freedoms be enjoyed if not in an atmosphere of tolerance. Indeed, tolerance is what allows every identity to find its full and appropriate expression.

For let us remember: tolerance does not mean passive acceptance. It is a way of life founded upon the active appreciation and understanding of the values and choices of others. It is the necessary complement to the diversity in which we all live.

In an increasingly global world, it is diversity – be it cultural, ethnic, religious, linguistic, social or other – that defines human societies, enriching all of us and making us more involved in and aware of the wider world. While it is true that pluralism cannot guarantee tolerance, the rejection of pluralism, on the other hand, is unquestionably one of the major causes of growing intolerance.

Protecting and promoting human diversity, within a framework of respect for fundamental rights and freedoms, is a constitutional priority of UNESCO. The Organization has set forth standards – like the Declaration of Principles of Tolerance (1995), the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001) and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005) – which recognize the importance of diversity and help foster a favourable, thus tolerant, environment.

Toward this end, UNESCO has sought to establish innovative new partnerships. One such initiative has been the creation of Coalitions of Cities against Racism, which in June 2008 achieved global coverage with the establishment of the International Coalition that federates all the existing regional networks.

No modern society can build itself to last or flourish in a culture of intolerance. I therefore hope that this International Day of Tolerance will be a fresh opportunity to stimulate action to promote mutual respect and understanding. Let it be an occasion to express our solidarity with victims of discrimination and intolerance, and to redouble our efforts to ensure that everyone everywhere can enjoy their universal and indivisible human rights.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Matsuura', with a stylized flourish above the name.

Koïchiro Matsuura