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Organización
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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 tribute that will be paid to Chingiz Aitmatov
to commemorate the first anniversary of his death**

UNESCO, 8 June 2009

Madam Deputy Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic,
Mr Permanent Delegate of Kyrgyzstan to UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO is very honoured to welcome you this evening on the occasion of this tribute to the memory of the great writer Chingiz Aitmatov.

Let me begin by welcoming Ms Uktomhan Abdullaeva, Deputy Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic and Mr Jyrgalbek Azylov, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO.

I thank them sincerely for their presence and their combined efforts in the holding of this event.

Through this tribute, we are honouring first and foremost the entire Kyrgyz nation, and the outstanding richness of its heritage and its culture. But this tribute, I must add, is also addressed to a friend and close collaborator of UNESCO.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The death last year of Chingiz Aitmatov greatly saddened the international community.

Recognized throughout the world as a major literary figure, he had conferred on Kyrgyz contemporary literature its patent of nobility.

Translated into many languages, including Japanese, he was a writer whom I was lucky enough to be able to read and admire. I have in mind in particular his famous novel "Jamilya", published in 1958, which made a great impact on me, and which

relates the burgeoning passion between two young people in a Kyrgyz village during the war, seen through the eyes of a young boy.

Aitmatov was a universal writer, using in turn the Kyrgyz and Russian languages, an impassioned defender of the national cultures and languages in the former Soviet Union, and he also put his ideals at the service of politics and diplomacy.

It was in his capacity as Permanent Delegate of Kyrgyzstan to UNESCO that Chinguiz Aitmatov thus worked relentlessly, from February 1997 to January 2008, to promote cultural diversity and dialogue among cultures.

He was, notably, the architect of a genuine regional dialogue on the questions of peace and sustainable development in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, in particular within the framework of the Issyk-Kul Forum, which he helped to establish in 1986.

I had already paid a first visit to Kyrgyzstan in October 2002, on the occasion of the Bishkek Global Mountain Summit.

I returned there for a second time in June 2004, precisely to the very beautiful site of Issyk-Kul, organizing, with Aitmatov's valuable assistance, a major high-level international conference on dialogue among cultures in Central Asia.

I participated on that occasion in the festivities organized to celebrate his 75th birthday and I then went on to Bishkek to attend a presentation of the Art of Akyns, the great Kyrgyz musicians and epic tellers, proclaimed Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2003.

Aitmatov was fervently devoted to the safeguarding of Kyrgyz traditional cultures and had played a key role in support of this Proclamation.

Today I am particularly happy that UNESCO is associated with this new tribute that is being paid to him.

All around these splendid yurts, we will be able to contemplate the photos of our friend, and the works by artists he appreciated. Lastly, this evening, a concert and the sharing of a glass in friendship will close this day of tribute and remembrance.

The passing away of Chinguiz Aitmatov leaves a great void in our hearts, but we are here to perpetuate his name, his memory and his ideals of freedom and tolerance.

Thank you for your attention.