



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
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Organisation  
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Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
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Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

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 International Conference Globalization through  
Localization- Cultural Dialogue through Harry Potter Translations**

**Fondation Simone et Cino del Duca**

**de l'institut de France,**

**8 September 2009**

Monsieur d'Hauterives, Secrétaire perpétuel de l'Académie des Beaux-arts de  
l'Institut de France,  
Madam Matsuoka Harris,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you this morning at this international conference devoted  
to cultural dialogue, languages and translation.

The springboard for the conference is of course the global phenomenon of the  
Harry Potter stories. Originally published in English and now translated into almost  
70 languages thanks to many of the people gathered here today, the captivating  
adventures of Harry Potter have opened the hearts and minds of millions of children  
all over the world to the joys of reading. This is a crucially important part of  
becoming literate, with all the benefits that this brings in terms of fulfilling one's  
potential and participating in the social, political and economic life of the community.

In short, literacy empowers us.

It is key to the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals  
including the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals. Yet, with  
776 million illiterate adults in the world and 75 million children not in school, the  
international community is a long way from achieving them. We must scale up our  
efforts on their behalf.

It is fitting that this conference, which touches on UNESCO's top priorities of education and culture, should take place on International Literacy Day 2009. UNESCO is grateful to the Fondation Simone et Cino del Duca of the Institut de France, and to you, M. d'Hauterives, for organizing this initiative to coincide with this important day.

Let me also take this opportunity to pay tribute to Madam Yuko Matsuko Harris, without whose passion for languages and literacy today's event would not have been possible.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The designation by the United Nations of 2008 as International Year of Languages, with UNESCO as lead agency, was a sign of the growing recognition of the strategic importance of languages in the economic, social and cultural life of societies.

Languages are more than mere tools for communication. It is through languages that people build, understand, express and transmit their values, knowledge and practices. Languages are also primary vehicles of cultural expressions and intangible cultural heritage, which are so essential to the identity of individuals and groups.

Multilingualism, often regarded as the harmonious and fruitful coexistence of languages, is an essential factor for intercultural dialogue. For this reason, UNESCO actively encourages multilingualism at school as well as in the media, cyberspace, publishing and all aspects of social life, as a way of promoting cultural and linguistic diversity and sustainable development.

Translators and interpreters play an important role in ensuring multilingualism. By allowing users of one language access to others, translators and interpreters are by definition creators of dialogue, central figures in the process of exchange and fertilization at the root of every civilization. Translators build bridges between worlds that may often seem incompatible, and transcend the barriers resulting from misunderstanding.

Furthermore, translation fosters freedom in so far as it allows everyone to use their preferred language without having to use an intermediate tongue or lingua franca.

Hence, translation facilitates the expression of the variety and nuances of the diversity of each language - and of all cultures. The fact that I, Japanese, can speak to a multinational audience in English at a meeting in Paris and be understood by everyone is a perfect illustration of this proposition!

Aware of the immense potential of translation in spreading knowledge and fostering dialogue among peoples, UNESCO has launched several key initiatives to support translation and translators.

These include the Collection of Representative Works implemented from 1948 to 2004; the 1976 "Recommendation on the legal protection of Translators and Translations and the practical means to improve the Status of Translators"; and the regularly updated World Bibliography of Translation "Index Translationum", the internationally acclaimed reference tool comprising over 3 million entries in some 900 languages.

In today's globalizing world, the role of translation is even more essential. On the one hand, local and national languages are treasured by countries and communities as sources of pride. Yet at the same time, international languages are valued as a means to communicate beyond linguistic barriers or territorial boundaries. Translation can serve as a valuable bridge between the local and international dimensions of everyday life and thus maintain the world's cultural and linguistic diversity.

The international book market can serve as a unique laboratory enabling us to observe this phenomenon. In the last twenty years, foreign literature has experienced an unprecedented boost. But despite the astounding quantity and quality of texts published each year worldwide, the variety and representative nature of the global market should not be taken for granted.

Although the publishing market is much more varied and wide-ranging than ever before, the industry must continue to promote cultural diversity as well as effective, inclusive, pluralism through judicious choices in the material selected for wide dissemination. The case of quality bestsellers like the Harry Potter series merits in-

depth study and observation because they help us better understand our world and the challenges to be met in the field of culture for years to come.

One such challenge that UNESCO endeavours to tackle is the promotion of translation into and from “local” languages through private-public partnerships involving translators, the publishing world and policy makers.

UNESCO is particularly pleased to grant its patronage to this international conference, which is one of the many follow-up activities to the International Year of Languages 2008.

I am confident that it will shed new light on cultural exchanges, shared imagination and dreams, and ways in which translation professionals can contribute to mutual understanding, social cohesion and, ultimately, peace.

I wish you a fruitful and inspired debate.