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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of International Mother Language Day**

21 February 2010

Every year for ten years now, we have been celebrating International Mother Language Day at UNESCO Headquarters and in Member States. By virtue of the numerous activities that have marked this celebration for ten years, the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism is now recognized. Over the years, the many and essential roles played by languages in the educational, cultural and economic fabric of our societies have come to be better understood.

The mother language, in which the first words are uttered and individual thought expressed, is the foundation for the history and culture of each individual. Moreover, it has been proven that children learn best when they are instructed in their mother language during their first years at school.

The concept of mother language complements that of multilingualism, which UNESCO strives to promote, by encouraging the acquisition of at least three levels of language proficiency: a mother language, a national language and a language of communication.

This 11th International Mother Language Day falls within the framework of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures. Languages are the best vehicles of mutual understanding and tolerance. Respect for all languages is a key factor for ensuring peaceful coexistence, without exclusion, of societies and all of their members.

Multilingualism, which can be defined as the harmonious accommodation of different languages spoken within a common space, therefore becomes an essential component of educational and cultural policies, to which attention must increasingly be paid.

At the same time, the learning of foreign languages and, as a result, the individual ability to use several languages encourages openness towards diversity and understanding of other cultures. As such, it must be promoted as a constructive and structural element of modern education.

Because of the increased pace of communication in our globalized world, translation is enjoying a level of growth unprecedented in the history of humanity. For it to become a genuine tool for reciprocal dialogue and knowledge, we must promote a more diversified and even more balanced context of cultural and scientific exchange.

Multilingualism, the learning of foreign languages and translation are three strategic axes for the language policies of tomorrow. On the occasion of this 11th International Mother Language Day, I am appealing to the international community to give the mother language, in each of these three axes, its rightful, fundamental place, in a spirit of respect and tolerance which paves the way for peace.

Irina Bokova