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**Message from Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the World Book and Copyright Day**

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Books are both object and idea. Tangible in form, intangible in content, they express the mind of an author and find meaning in the imagination of readers. Reading is this private conversation, but books are all about sharing — sharing experience, knowledge and understanding.

This is the wealth we celebrate on *World Book and Copyright Day*. Books are the most powerful forms of dialogue between individuals, within communities, between generations and with other societies. This unique means of dialogue must be protected. The technology of books is old, but it remains cutting-edge, functional and in some conditions irreplaceable. This does not mean that change is not happening or that we should resist it outright.

UNESCO's responsibility is to explore all of the repercussions of change and make the most of it -- while preserving those values and forms of expression that we share and cherish. Our role is to provide a platform for debate and to act as a knowledge-broker to explore old and new ideas.

The global book market is deeply affected by the rise of e-books and downloadable content. This is transforming the industry. It is impacting on publishers. It is touching on authors and readers. The implications of this transformation will be deep and long-term.

Change is giving rise also to sharp new debates -- about the strengths and weaknesses of different kinds of products, about the nature of copyright today,

about the role of libraries relative to on-line knowledge, about the meaning of 'authorship' in a world of blogs and wikis.

We must explore these complex debates. UNESCO is taking the lead. The *Second UNESCO World Forum on Culture and the Cultural Industries* will be held in June in Monza, Italy. The theme could not be more timely: "The Book Tomorrow; the Future of the Written Word".

Books embody the human capacity to conjure up worlds of reality and imagination and to express them. They are the best voices of tolerance. They provide the strongest signs of hope. Books are pillars for free and open societies.

We must protect them. We must make their wealth available to the 800 million adults that still do not have reading skills. We must explore all aspects of the changes they are undergoing today. These are pledges around which we gather on this *World Book and Copyright Day*.

Irina Bokova