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Message from

**Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO,**

on the occasion of the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage

27 October 2011

Among all the types of humanity's heritage, the audiovisual heritage is one of those that provide the most direct and intuitive access to the wealth of world cultures and the infinite diversity of human civilization.

Audiovisual records offer unique means of learning, sharing and becoming informed through sound and image. They are, in form and content, living testimonies to the history of technology, performance and culture. By presenting images and sounds from foreign cultures, historic moments shaping our collective memory, they contribute to cementing the foundations of intercultural dialogue and enriching humanity's awareness.

All these records, these films and soundtracks, are also extremely vulnerable. Part of the twentieth century audiovisual archive collection has already disappeared, victim of technological obsolescence, institutional neglect and losses due to deterioration, deliberate destruction or ignorance. The rapid development of the digital world has only compounded the challenges.

Protection of these records is a cultural and educational imperative and must never be taken for granted. Quite the opposite: it is an ongoing task. It is one of the central aspects of UNESCO's flagship Memory of the World programme, which ensures the protection of humanity's documentary heritage in all its forms. Many audiovisual records have already been included in the Memory of the World Register: "The Story of the Kelly Gang", the first feature-length fiction film, the complete original film production of the Lumière brothers, and the "Liberation

Struggle Living Archive Collection”, a unique documentary on the apartheid system in South Africa. They are each an irreplaceable source of learning and discovery. Their loss would impoverish our world heritage and be tantamount to collective amnesia.

To protect the audiovisual heritage, appropriate safeguard measures should be instituted and training and support for archive professionals, libraries and specialized institutions provided. I invite today all UNESCO’s partners and collaborators to redouble efforts to ensure the protection of this unique documentary heritage and help it to fulfil all its educational and cultural promises.

Irina Bokova