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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 World Poetry Day**

**21 March 2015**

The poet John Burnside wrote:

*“If what we insist on calling  
fate seems inexplicable or cruel  
it’s only because  
we lack the imagination  
to wish for what it brings,  
to brighten it  
with something more inventive  
than dismay.”*

This is the power of poetry. It is the power of imagination to brighten reality, to inspire our thoughts with something more inventive than dismay.

Poetry is the universal human song, expressing the aspiration of every woman and man to apprehend the world and share this understanding with others, through the arrangement of words in rhythm and meter. There may be nothing more delicate than a poem and, yet, it expresses all of the power of the human mind, and so there is nothing more resilient.

Poetry is as old as humanity itself, and as diverse -- embodied in traditions, oral and written, that are as varied as are the human face, each capturing the depth of emotions, thought and aspiration that guide every woman and men.

Poetry is intimate expression that open doors to others, enriching the dialogue that catalyses all human progress, weaving cultures together and reminding all people of the destiny they hold in common. In this way, poetry is a fundamental expression of peace. In the words of Cherif Khaznadar, laureate of the UNESCO-*Sharjah Prize for Arab Culture*, “*Knowledge of the other is the gateway to dialogue, and dialogue can only be established in difference and respect for difference.*” Poetry is the ultimate expression of difference in dialogue, in the spirit of unity.

Every poem is unique but each reflects the universal in human experience, the aspiration for creativity that crosses all boundaries and borders, of time as well as space, in the constant affirmation of humanity as a single family.

This is the spirit of *World Poetry Day*, and this guides all of UNESCO’s work to strengthen humanity as a single community – by safeguarding poetic documentary heritage under the Memory of the World Programme, as well as humanity’s intangible heritage. This is embodied in the recent inscription of Al-Zajal on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This traditional Lebanese poetry expression espouses tolerance and dialogue to resolve conflict and strengthen social cohesion.

In times of uncertainty and turbulence, perhaps never before have we needed the power of poetry to bring women and men together, to craft new forms of dialogue, to nurture the creativity all societies need today. This is UNESCO’s message on *World Poetry Day*.

Irina Bokova