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联合国教育、
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Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of International Francophonie Day

“The French language, our bridge for action”

20 March 2018

In 1962, in a seminal issue of the French literary magazine *Esprit*, the word “Francophonie” reappeared: a word which had been invented 80 years earlier without great success. In the issue, Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first person to capitalize the word, defined Francophonie in terms that became famous: “this integral Humanism which weaves itself around the earth: this symbiosis of the ‘dormant energies’ from all the continents, all the races, awakening to their complementary warmth”.

The history of the dissemination of the French language is certainly not a peaceful one. It is a language that has travelled over time, through merchants, philosophers, writers and scientists, but also through colonial history. However human ingenuity is such that, capable of the worst and the best, the imposed language, these “spoils of war” in the words of Kateb Yacine, was finally appropriated, claimed and cherished. From then on, the French language had 1,000 homelands to which its destiny would be inextricably entwined; that is, 1,000 new ways of speaking, writing, thinking, and shaping the language and the world.

The French language, decentred, expanded and creolized as Edouard Glissant was so pleased to see, is today spoken by almost 300 million people. On this International Francophonie Day, it is this diversity of destinies, united by a common language, that we are invited to celebrate. A community of men and women who do not know each other and who live across five continents, but who nevertheless speak with the same signs, read the same authors, love and think in the same words, strangers for whom, in the words of Albert Camus, their homeland is the French language: and so we have the foundation of Francophonie, which UNESCO and the International Organisation of La Francophonie, this year as in previous years, will do their utmost to promote as an extraordinary space for thought, cooperation and dialogue which must live on in the world.