

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of World Book and Copyright Day**

23 April 2023

Books are some of the most remarkable objects in existence, and this day is dedicated to them.

A book, whatever its format, is an essential means of education and source of knowledge. It is with books that we learn to read. And it is thanks to them that we keep ourselves informed, are entertained and are able to understand the world.

A book is also an exceptional way to discover worlds and characters which would otherwise be difficult to come across – and even more difficult to understand. By creating a conversation between places and times, books offer us intimate access to otherness and foster mutual respect and understanding between individuals and cultures. With books, the path to the Other begins with and comes back to oneself.

Nevertheless, for books to be able to unleash their full potential, it is essential that they reflect the extraordinary linguistic variety of our world. Every written language brings with it a particular world-view, a particular perspective on things and on beings, a particular way of thinking and feeling. Explaining his decision to write in the Kikuyu language, the great Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has said that the choice of a language and the purpose for which it is used are central to a people’s own definition of themselves in relation to their natural and social environment, and even in relation to the entire universe.

Thus, in order to preserve both the integrity and the diversity of cultures and their expressions, last year the United Nations launched the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL) (2022–2032). The aim of IDIL, led by UNESCO, is to promote these particularly endangered languages and so to protect the rights and cultures of Indigenous Peoples.

This priority is reflected, in particular, in the marvellous work carried out by the UNESCO World Book Capitals. Last year, for example, in Guadalajara, Mexico, workshops were held to teach people about the issues associated with linguistic diversity. And in Accra, Ghana, which today becomes the World Book Capital for 2023, this work continues with the construction of a cultural centre which will spotlight reading and writing in the Ga language.

We are also committed to protecting both the accessibility of literature and its linguistic diversity. This undertaking is all the more necessary today, given the risk of homogenization which comes with digital technology.

This is why we must support the online circulation of works from all cultures and in all languages, as well as the fair remuneration of all those involved in the book industry, beginning with, of course, the authors. After all, behind every book there is an entire chain of know-how and skills which has led to its creation.

We need this commitment in order to make literature – as well as all culture in general – a true “global public good”, as called for by UNESCO Member States at the MONDIACULT 2022 conference in Mexico City.

On this day, UNESCO and all its partners invite you not only to celebrate reading and culture, but also to make a commitment to their support.