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联合国教育、
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**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion
of the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage**

Theme: "Audiovisual Heritage as a witness of Cultural Identity"

27 October 2008

Today is World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, a day for reflecting on the power of film, television and radio to transmit ideas and information and in so doing nurture dialogue among and between communities around the world.

While heritage permits us to understand the past, it also reflects the cultural identities and diversity of communities living today, with audiovisual heritage, in particular, being a primary means for contemporary societies to portray their values and express their creativity. Indeed, radio and television are the most widely used means of transmitting cultural products globally. As well as being important sources of information, the immediacy of sound recordings and moving images, with their power to span linguistic, cultural or other barriers, permit peoples from different walks of life to understand each other and share experiences directly.

The proclamation of 2008 by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Year of Languages, which UNESCO has the privilege to lead, was particularly significant for audiovisual heritage, as images and sounds offer the possibility of promoting linguistic diversity and fostering mutual understanding. The development of local television and radio content, as well as the ability to access different cultures and perspectives through national and international channels are particularly important in this regard as they further enrich global diversity and open paths to dialogue. But while the role of audiovisual records in bridging gaps is indisputable, the format is intrinsically fragile and their disappearance would mean the loss of a significant portion of our global heritage, along with the memory and

identity of the people it depicts. It was in part this fragility that led the 33rd session of UNESCO's General Conference to declare a World Day for Audiovisual Heritage.

The collective memory of the different peoples of the world provides the foundation for sustainable development, the defence of basic rights and an understanding of the past. But that memory needs to remain accessible. Sadly, much of it is currently endangered as a result of obsolescence, neglect, deliberate destruction or simple ignorance of the part memory plays in nourishing each and every culture. Sometimes access to heritage is refused by its custodians, leading not only to a break in the link between the past, present and future but also to an impoverishment of diversity.

Preservation of heritage entails major efforts where printed and written documents are concerned, but audiovisual records are far more endangered – and on a larger scale – than conventional carriers. Their preservation is affected by factors as diverse as the spontaneous ignition of nitrate films or the vinegar syndrome of acetate film; bacterial or fungal infestations; colour fading or sound deterioration; sticky tape syndrome or demagnetization and technical obsolescence; as well as lack of legislation and training curricula for professional or technical staff.

Consequently, there is an urgent need not only for greater awareness of these issues, but also for the allocation of the human and financial resources for preservation so that future generations may benefit from the legacies of the past. Without concerted action, this heritage is doomed, and with it, the existence of some indigenous communities whose voices now live on only through audiovisual recordings made before their world vanished.

On this, the second World Day for Audiovisual Heritage, I call upon UNESCO's partners and friends: governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector to work with us to ensure that audiovisual heritage receives the recognition it deserves both as a witness of cultural identity and a custodian of the world's cultural and linguistic diversity.



Koïchiro Matsuura