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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,

Director-General of UNESCO,

on the occasion of International Mother Language Day

21 February 2008

The ninth celebration of International Mother Language Day on 21 February is of particular importance in this year of 2008, proclaimed International Year of Languages by the United Nations General Assembly, which has entrusted UNESCO with the task of coordinating it.

So this International Mother Language Day is an especially promising opportunity to recall what is at stake. Languages are absolutely vital to the identity of groups and individuals, and their peaceful coexistence. They are a strategic factor in advances towards sustainable development and the harmonious coordination of the global and the local.

Far from being a field reserved for analysis by specialists, languages lie at the heart of all social, economic and cultural life. That is the meaning of the slogan launched by UNESCO for the International Year of Languages: "Languages matter!".

Languages do indeed matter in attaining the six education for all (EFA) goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) which the United Nations agreed upon in 2000. They matter when we want to promote cultural diversity, and fight illiteracy, and they matter for quality education, including teaching in the mother language in the first years of schooling. They matter in the fight for greater social inclusion, for creativity, economic development and safeguarding indigenous knowledge.

On the occasion of this ninth International Mother Language Day, I am launching an appeal for the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism to be acknowledged everywhere, in education, administrative and legal systems, in cultural expressions and in the media, cyberspace and trade. Let all the members of the United Nations family, all the Member States, and partners and friends of UNESCO join together to show that "languages matter"!

Koïchiro Matsuura