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联合国教育、
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Message from Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the International Literacy Day

8 September 2011

. This year, International Literacy Day places a special focus on the essential
. relationship between literacy and peace.

Lasting peace is founded on respect for human rights and social justice.

Literacy, the foundation of all education and lifelong learning, is one of these rights.

Literacy is a prerequisite for peace because it carries multiple benefits, cutting
across the human, cultural, social, political and economic spheres.

In today's knowledge driven societies, lack of literacy is more than ever
synonymous with exclusion and marginalization.

According to the most recent figures (2009), 793 million adults lack basic literacy
skills, the majority are girls and women. A further 67 million children of primary
school age are not in primary school and 72 million adolescents of lower secondary
school age are also missing out their right to an education, running the risk of
creating a new generation of illiterates.

This unacceptable situation is holding back all efforts to reduce poverty and
advance human development.

It is an infringement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and a threat to
peace and security.

Literacy is a development accelerator and a force for peace.

First, literacy empowers individuals, equipping them with the skills and confidence
to seek out vital information and to make informed choices that have a direct impact
on their families and communities.

Second literacy is a condition for individuals to effectively participate in democratic processes, to claim a voice in community organizations, gain political knowledge and thereby contribute to shaping the quality of public policies.

Third, literacy programs strengthen mutual understanding by enabling people to share ideas and to express, preserve and develop their cultural identity and diversity.

No country can hope to establish lasting conditions for peace unless it finds ways of building mutual trust between its citizens through inclusive education systems that promote mutual understanding, respect, tolerance and dialogue.

It is crucial to integrate literacy in peace building processes in order to plant the seeds of peace, foster dialogue and reconciliation, and give youth and adults the skills they need to seek decent employment.

The 2011 International Literacy Prizes reward ground-breaking programs that show the central role of literacy in promoting human rights, gender equality, conflict resolution and cultural diversity. All programs highlight that even in the most difficult contexts, good quality literacy programs are working and bringing lasting change into the lives of youth and adults.

Investing in literacy programs is a sensible and essential development choice. Literacy is a key component of strategies to promote sustainable development and peace. It is central to achieving Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals.

The world urgently needs increased political commitment to literacy backed by adequate resources to scale up effective programs. Today I urge governments, international organizations, civil society and the private sector to make literacy a policy priority, so that every individual can develop their potential, and actively participate in shaping more sustainable, just and peaceful societies.

Irina Bokova