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Organización
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message of the UNESCO Director-General,
Irina Bokova,
on the occasion of International Mother Language Day**

21 February 2011

All languages are linked through their origins and borrowing, but each is a unique source of meaning for understanding, writing and expressing reality.

Mother languages are special in providing the material with which the world is first voiced, the lens through which it is first understood. *International Mother Language Day* is a moment to recognize their importance and to mobilise for multilingualism and linguistic diversity.

Mother languages, along with linguistic diversity, matter for the identity of individuals. As sources of creativity and vehicles for cultural expression, they are also important for the health of societies. Not least, languages are factors for development and growth. We know how important education in the mother language is for learning outcomes. Mother language instruction is a powerful way to fight discrimination and reach out to marginalised populations. As wellsprings of knowledge, languages are also starting points for greater sustainability in development, for managing more harmoniously our relationship with the environment and change.

Multilingualism opens fabulous opportunities for the dialogue that is necessary to understanding and cooperation. Mother languages live harmoniously with the acquisition of other languages. A plural linguistic space allows the wealth of diversity to put in common. It accelerates the exchange of knowledge and experience. This was one of the core themes of the 2010, *International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures*. Building on the mother language, the learning of multiple languages must be a pillar of 21st century education.

At the same time, we can do more to support the balanced development of translation, as a channel to open to all the great diversity of knowledge and experience throughout the world.

The theme of the 2011 *International Mother Language Day* concerns the use of information and communication technologies for safeguarding and promoting languages and linguistic diversity.

Languages provide the software for information and communication technologies. These technologies are also a new frontier for promoting linguistic diversity. UNESCO is committed to promoting multilingualism on the Internet. These goals guide UNESCO in its work with the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers.

Innovative technologies provide new ways also to follow, examine and learn languages. The success of the online edition of UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* shows the power of the Internet to track the state of languages and multilingualism, and to raise awareness with a global audience.

Information and communication technologies can be especially useful in promoting mother languages. We must harness the power of progress to protect diverse visions of the world and to promote all sources of knowledge and forms of expression. These are the threads that weave the tapestry of humanity's story. The innovation, flexibility and social interaction that lie at the heart of new information and communication technologies can support these goals. On this *International Mother Language Day*, let us pledge to work together in this direction.

Irina Bokova