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**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of World Book and Copyright Day**

23 April 2007

The twelfth World Book and Copyright Day, on 23 April 2007, provides a further opportunity for political decision-makers, economic operators and civil society stakeholders to pay tribute to that unique tool for expression, education and communication: the book.

Since it was first celebrated in 1996, World Book and Copyright Day has won over to its cause a considerable number of people from all continents and all cultural backgrounds. As a result, much has been said about the vital multiple roles that the book plays in the educational, cultural and economic fabric of our societies. The dual nature of these products of the publishing industry, which are both goods for sale and works of the mind, has repeatedly been emphasized.

Much has also been said about the book as the driving force behind a wide array of income-generating activities and about the role of the book within today's knowledge economies as an instrument for learning, sharing and updating knowledge. Of course, the linguistic dimension of publishing, an instrument of expression that lives through language and within a language, has also been emphasized and remains a decisive factor.

Lastly, as there can be no book development without copyright, the celebration of the Day has always been closely associated, from its inception and throughout all these years, with an awareness of the importance of the moral and heritage protection afforded to works of the human spirit and their creators.

This year, more than ever, I wish to emphasize the complementarity of all these aspects and highlight their importance with regard to freedom of expression and the safeguarding and promotion of expressions of cultural diversity, which are major issues for humanity.

Such action, which has an ethical as much as a political dimension, is part of a long-term approach and requires specific and lasting measures for the promotion of books and reading, whose impact will extend far beyond the symbolic date of 23 April. The implementation of innovative programmes, such as the annual celebration of “World Book Capitals”, aimed at giving prominence to the best support programmes for the publishing industry, is, in that respect, exemplary. Launched in 2001 by UNESCO following an initiative by publishing professionals in Madrid, this programme, managed by major international book-trade associations, has led to the gradual establishment of a veritable global network of cities that are committed, through dialogue and the exchange of best practices, to the promotion of books and reading.

To mark the twelfth celebration of World Book and Copyright Day, I therefore formally invite all countries and UNESCO's partners and friends to join us and contribute to this important event, which places the key issues of quality, pluralism and integration, together with the sharing of knowledge and its dissemination, at the very heart of the project to promote knowledge societies.

Koïchiro Matsuura