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Message from Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO,

on the occasion of the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage

Theme: “Save and savour your audiovisual collections – now”

27 October 2010

Audiovisual records – film, video, radio and recorded sound material – mirror human creativity and the living fabric of our cultures. They not only preserve in space and time priceless testimonies of our history but also encourage cultural dialogue and better understanding of different cultures and perspectives. In this International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, saving and savouring our audiovisual heritage, the theme of this fourth day for Audiovisual Heritage, assumes a special relevance.

Yet savouring this heritage is conditional on its survival. The world's audiovisual heritage is endangered. Too much of it has already been lost through neglect of its value, chemical decay or technological obsolescence. Its disappearance would represent an irremediable impoverishment of the memory of the world.

Can we contemplate the eclipse of seminal moments in our history that we have the power to preserve: the first moon landing in 1969 or the walk to freedom of Nelson Mandela after his release from prison in 1990? These are engraved in the minds of those who witnessed them at the time, but will future generations have the chance to be able to experience them with the same sense of immediacy?

Audiovisual heritage is by nature fragile. UNESCO, in partnership with the Coordinating Council of Audiovisual Archive Associations, and heritage bodies around the world, has taken a leading role to preserve and share these ephemeral documents.

UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme was launched to safeguard valuable documentary heritage and to raise awareness about its inestimable value for present and future generations. The Memory of the World Register, established in 1997, contains close to 200 examples of documentary heritage, including audiovisual, deemed of universal value.

To safeguard the world's audiovisual heritage is to preserve our collective memory, and to ensure its transmission to future generations. We must understand the past to shape a common future founded on dialogue and understanding. On this Fourth World Day, I invite Member States, National Commissions, non-governmental organizations and public and private institutions to promote public awareness and recognition of the significance of the audiovisual heritage and to support efforts to preserve it as a testimony to future generations.

Irina Bokova