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**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO**

on the occasion of World Day of Romani Language

5 November 2016

World Day of Romani Language, instituted by the UNESCO General Conference, is an opportunity to promote a valuable component of the world's linguistic and cultural heritage. The Romani language, or *Romani čhib*, was declared the official language of all Roma people in the world on the occasion of the first World Romani Congress, held in London in 1971. It is the main system of communication, identity, socialization and cultural integration for the Roma people, who today live dispersed in almost every country of the world.

This ancient language is now endangered, and UNESCO recalls the need to preserve and enhance this integral part of the Roma identity, a key vector for conveying cultural traditions that enrich our common humanity. UNESCO is delighted to support the endeavours of researchers, linguists, university professors, writers and journalists who use the Romani language. The Organization also encourages the numerous actions already undertaken at the international level, such as the proposed charter and declaration on the Romani language.

World Day of Romani Language must also further spur us to promote Roma education and culture, in particular encouraging generations of young Roma to learn their mother language in schools. Thus, UNESCO is committed to quality education for Roma children through a special programme, conducted in cooperation with the Council of Europe since 2006. UNESCO and the Council of Europe have accordingly published *Guidelines on Preschool Education for Roma Children*. Defending a language means supporting a policy to combat all forms of discrimination and to promote social inclusion. Today I call on all UNESCO's Member States to pool their efforts to that end.

Irina Bokova