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Organisation
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pour l'éducation,
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Organización
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para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
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**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion
of the International Day of Peace**

21 September 2008

Each year, 21 September is celebrated around the world as the International Day of Peace. As one of the central tenets of UNESCO's mission is to contribute to the building of peace, this Day has particularly significance for the Organization. This year, it also coincides with the United Nations campaign to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The motto of this campaign - "Dignity and justice for all of us" - reminds us that we still have a long way to go before all of the world's people are able to enjoy the rights and fundamental freedoms embodied in the Declaration. Recognizing that promoting human rights is fundamental to building a culture of peace, UNESCO is aiming to achieve further progress in the implementation of those rights that lay within the Organization's fields of competence, and to make the standards and principles of international human rights law known and understood as widely as possible. These rights include the right to quality education, the right to freedom of opinion and expression, the right to participate in cultural life, the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its application and, underpinning all of them, the right to express oneself in one's mother tongue.

In order to develop peaceful, nonviolent societies, every child must be able to access quality education that respects his or her right to dignity and optimum development. Quality education provides knowledge about a culture of peace, and imparts the skills and attitudes needed to defuse and recognize potential conflicts, as well as those needed to actively promote and establish a culture of peace and non-violence. UNESCO is working to promote a rights-based approach to quality education throughout the whole education system and in all learning environments

to promote social cohesion and build respect for peace and non-violent conflict resolution.

Exercising the right to freedom of opinion and expression is one of the essential pillars of peace. It is instrumental to the emergence and functioning of effective democratic systems and to full and effective participation in a free and democratic society. However, many journalists, media workers and human rights advocates come under attack when trying to exercise or defend these rights. UNESCO is a vociferous advocate of press freedom and the rights and safety of media and information professionals. It also supports Member States in creating the conditions for media to function in a democratic setting and to exercise freedom of expression.

The right to participate in cultural life is fundamental to social cohesion, mutual understanding and peace. Our culture shapes our identity, teaches us ways of living together, and helps us develop our value systems, traditions and beliefs. Cultural rights are also linked to how people are able to express themselves in the public sphere and their access to socio-economic opportunities, which are particularly important for minority and indigenous groups who often do not enjoy these rights. UNESCO is working to promote these rights by building decision-makers' and the general public's awareness of the importance of culture both in the development process and the establishment of pluralistic societies and their corollary, intercultural dialogue. Such interaction across national and cultural frontiers is key to building and consolidating peace and to induce people to engage in peaceful practices and behaviour.

The right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its application underpins national, regional and global efforts to promote sustainable development and a culture of peace. UNESCO promotes the implementation of this right by working to develop and strengthen national and regional research and innovation systems, and encouraging the development and implementation of science and technology and innovation policies for sustainable development and poverty eradication.

Languages are fundamental to the achievement of all these rights. In 2008, proclaimed International Year of Languages by the United Nations General Assembly and for which UNESCO is lead agency, the Organization is highlighting the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism with the goal of fostering the protection and promotion of all languages in all aspects of a society's life, and

especially in education systems. Without such policies, hundreds of thousands of people around the world may be denied their right to express themselves and to engage in public life and debate. Such exclusion can foster tension and violence.

The advancement of these rights is linked to UNESCO's activities to foster a culture of peace in cooperation with governments, other United Nations agencies and programmes, and civil society. The Organization has the special responsibility, given to it by the United Nations General Assembly, of leading the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the world (2001-2010).

As part of the celebrations surrounding the International Day of Peace, the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education 2008 is being awarded to the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (South Africa), in recognition of its outstanding efforts in building sustainable reconciliation through education and in addressing systemic injustice in Africa. The Institute for Justice and Reconciliation was founded in 2000 to foster reconciliation in post-Apartheid South Africa and to advocate peace through thorough socio-political analysis. Since then, the Cape Town-based institute has helped other African countries including Rwanda, Sudan, and Burundi engage in a similar process.

This is an outstanding example of an organization working to promote peace and human rights. Such organizations must be encouraged to flourish and to join with others in the international community to form a broad coalition that works to increase and strengthen global efforts aimed at ensuring that each and every man, woman and child enjoys the fundamental rights and freedoms defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Together, we must work towards ending the flagrant violations of human rights occurring in the world today in order to create the conditions necessary to build a culture of peace – one of the greatest challenges for humanity.



Koïchiro Matsuura