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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Message from**

**Ms Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO,**

**on the occasion of International Mother Language Day**

**Local languages for global citizenship: spotlight on science**

**UNESCO, 21 February 2014**

For 14 years now, UNESCO and its partners have celebrated International Mother Language Day. We have organized activities, conferences, concerts and seminars around the world to highlight the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism.

The protection and promotion of mother languages are keys to global citizenship and authentic mutual understanding. Understanding and speaking more than one language leads to a greater understanding of the wealth of cultural interactions in our world. Recognizing local languages enables more people to make their voices heard and take an active part in their collective fate. That is why UNESCO makes every effort to promote the harmonious coexistence of the 7,000 languages spoken by humanity.

This year, we place special emphasis on “Local languages for global citizenship: spotlight on science”, showing how languages ensure access to knowledge, its transmission and its plurality. Contrary to popular wisdom, local languages are perfectly capable of transmitting the most modern scientific knowledge in mathematics, physics, technology and so on. Recognizing these languages also means opening the door to a great deal of often overlooked traditional scientific knowledge to enrich our overall knowledge base.

Local languages constitute the majority of languages spoken across our world in the field of science. They are also the most endangered. Excluding languages means excluding those who speak them from their fundamental human right to scientific knowledge.

And yet, the rapprochement of peoples in the “global village” makes working towards intercultural understanding and dialogue ever more vital. In today’s world, the norm is to use at least three languages, including one local language, one language of wider communication and one international language to communicate at both the local and global levels. This linguistic and cultural diversity may be our best chance for the future: for creativity, innovation and inclusion. We must not squander it.

International Mother Language Day has contributed for more than a decade to highlighting the many roles played by languages in shaping minds, in the broadest sense, and building a global citizenship where we all have the means of contributing to the lives and challenges of societies. I call upon all the Member States of UNESCO, the International Organisation of La Francophonie – which is associated with the Day in 2014 – those active in civil society, educators, cultural associations and the media to make the most of this promise of linguistic diversity for peace and sustainable development.

Irina Bokova