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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO,

on the occasion of the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage

"Archives at risk: Protecting the world's identities."

27 October 2015

Audiovisual heritage, such as films, radio and television programmes and audio and video recordings, reflects our history and offers a unique account of our societies and the diversity of world cultures. This heritage is an incomparable source for understanding the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It reflects the identity of peoples and demonstrates the richness of national cultures through their various traditions and languages. Its capacity to instantly summon up sounds and pictures, often from well beyond local borders and language barriers, makes this heritage an essential complement to more traditional archives and documents.

This audiovisual heritage must be accessible to one and all. Yet audiovisual documents are both living things and delicate and vulnerable. A large share of the world's audiovisual heritage has already been lost forever through negligence, destruction, bad luck or a lack of appropriate resources, competencies and structures, thereby depleting the memory of humanity. That vulnerability is especially acute in conflict situations. Its disappearance can also sometimes deprive us of a subtle grasp of the nature of societies and their peoples. We have 10 to 15 years left to transfer available audiovisual recordings to digital media and prevent their loss. We need to join forces to change the situation – for it is of the utmost importance that this recent history be understood and shared not only for issues of identity and affiliation but also for a clearer grasp of relationships and challenges in contemporary societies.

UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme is participating in this effort and every single inscription reflects a collective memory rooted in the archives and documents left by past generations. The fact is that "safeguarding for safeguarding's sake" is

not enough: the individual also needs to be able to put the documents in perspective so as to shed light on their meaning today, as well as to understand what they mean to individual societies and what they can tell us about our common humanity. The audiovisual heritage plays a key role in this work to promote what unites us and not what divides us. In so doing it can help to nurture universal values and to build a culture of tolerance and peace.

In that spirit, for this world day, I am asking all Member States, the producers and consumers of sounds and pictures, and the institutions in charge of safeguarding them to join forces to protect and share our common audiovisual wealth.

Irina Bokova