



UN official extols role of mother languages in spreading knowledge



Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO

21 February 2011 – The head of the United Nations agency tasked with preserving the world's cultural heritage and promoting education today highlighted the importance of mother languages, stressing their role as sources of human knowledge and creativity, and vehicles of cultural expression.

“Mother languages, along with linguistic diversity, matter for the identity of individuals. As sources of creativity and vehicles for cultural expression, they are also important for the health of societies,” said Irina Bokova, the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**), in a **message** to mark International Mother Language Day.

This year's Day focuses on the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) for safeguarding and promoting languages and linguistic diversity.

“These technologies are also a new frontier for promoting linguistic diversity. UNESCO is committed to promoting multilingualism on the Internet,” said Ms. Bokova.

“Information and communication technologies can be especially useful in promoting mother languages. We must harness the power of progress to protect diverse visions of the world and to promote all sources of knowledge and forms of expression. These are the threads that weave the tapestry of humanity's story,” she added.

Half of the world's 6,000 languages are endangered, according to UNESCO.

At its Paris headquarters today, the agency is holding an information meeting and debate entitled “Projects on Linguistic Diversity and New Technologies.”

Linguists, representatives to UNESCO, officials from International Organisation of La Francophonie and the Latin Union will report on the latest updates of the Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, as well as the first results of a UNESCO project that analyses linguistic trends since the 1950s. Debates on bilingual education and the new technologies are also on the agenda.

This year, UNESCO will launch a campaign via the social media Twitter and Facebook to encourage users to share stories, photographs and video illustrating the potential of new technologies for the promotion of linguistic diversity.

International Mother Language Day, celebrated every year since 2000 on 21 February, aims to raise awareness of the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity and of multilingual education.

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