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On annual World Book Day, UN stresses importance of translation



Photo: UNESCO

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Marking [World Book and Copyright Day](#), the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) today highlighted the importance of translation to ensuring that everyone has access to the tremendous potential of books.

UNESCO chose 23 April to celebrate World Book and Copyright Day as it also marks the day in 1616 that Britain's William Shakespeare, Spain's Miguel de Cervantes and the Peruvian writer "El Inca" Garcilaso de la Vega all died. The prominent writers Vladimir Nabokov, Halldór Laxness, Josep Pla, Maurice Druon and Manuel Mejía Vallejo were also either born or died on this day.

In her message to mark the Day, UNESCO's Director-General, Irina Bokova, said books are "valuable tools" for knowledge-sharing, mutual understanding and openness to others and to the world.

"Without equitable access to the content and resources of physical or virtual libraries, the power of books wanes and their diversity diminishes," she added. "The book chain is based on fragile balances and requires active vigilance and instruments to support it."

One such instrument is the *Index Translationum*, the world bibliography of translations, managed by UNESCO. The Index, which is celebrating its 80th anniversary, contains information about published translations provided by national libraries, translators, linguists, researchers and databases worldwide.

The electronic database of the Index numbers over two million entries concerning 500,000 authors and 78,000 publishers in 148 countries. The database reveals, for example, that Agatha Christie, Jules Verne and William Shakespeare are the world's most translated authors, while French, German and Spanish are the languages into which most books are translated.

Calling it a "formidable tool for the dissemination and monitoring of global cultural flows," Ms. Bokova said called on Member States to join forces to build a more comprehensive, efficient and open instrument, in the face of increasing numbers of publications.

"Translation is the first step towards the rapprochement of peoples, and is also a decentralizing experience, teaching diversity and dialogue. Translation is one of the driving principles of our creative diversity, which enriches each language through contact with all the others," she noted.

UNESCO launched the celebrations of World Book and Copyright Day in Yerevan, Armenia, which was chosen as World Book Capital for 2012.

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