

Dialogue can spur understanding, says UNESCO head on slavery anniversary



Drum Beating for International Slave Day opening ceremony

23 August 2009 – Marking the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, the head of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (**UNESCO**) today underscored the importance of dialogue in consolidating tolerance.

“By coming together around a shared vision of the history of the slave trade and slavery, we can build a shared history and lay the foundations of an intercultural dialogue that can deliver a universal message of knowledge and tolerance,” Koïchiro Matsuura, UNESCO's Director-General, said in a **message** marking the Day.

To this end, in 1994 the agency launched the **Slave Route project** which, among other aims, seeks to clarify the consequences and interactions resulting from the slave trade by drawing on “the diversity of memories, cultures and perceptions.

Mr. Matsuura said that “such respect for the diversity of memories is a democratic requirement that should cater for social demand and be accompanied by the search for shared references.”

This respect can be fostered through education, with textbooks and curricula including issues of remembrance linked to the slave trade's history.

“A lasting intercultural dialogue can only thrive in an interchange that is at peace with history and remembrance,” the UNESCO head noted.

“To avoid making memory sacred in any way and ward off the devastating effects of competing memories, we must foster a researching and teaching of history that explains and induces understanding, reconstructs the plot of conflictive narratives, and provides silences with answers.”

The International Day commemorates the uprising on 23 August 1791, when slaves of Santo Domingo in the Caribbean launched an insurrection which ultimately led to the Haitian revolution and promoted the cause of human rights.