

Message from Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of International Literacy Day



Every year, on September 8th, we raise the flag for literacy as a human right, as a force for dignity, and as a foundation for cohesive societies and sustainable development.

This message is especially vital this year, when States will adopt a new agenda for education and development to guide the next 15 years. Promoting literacy must stand at the heart of this new agenda. By empowering individual women and men, literacy helps to advance sustainable development across the board -- from better healthcare and food security to eradicating poverty and promoting decent work.

There has been progress across the world since

2000, but steep challenges remain. Today, 757 million adults still lack basic literacy skills -- two thirds are women. The number of out-of-school children and adolescents is on the rise, standing at 124 million worldwide – while some 250 million children of primary school age are failing to master basic literacy skills even in schooling.

We cannot allow this to continue. Literacy is essential to reach the proposed sustainable development goal to promote “inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.”

This is UNESCO’s message on International Literacy Day. To allow all women and men to participate fully in their societies, we need greater investment and more effective policies to embed action for literacy within wider development policies, supported by innovative mechanisms that generate positive synergies across all policy areas that are vital to building more just and cohesive societies. This is essential to all efforts to build a better future for all, on the basis of human rights and dignity.

Irina Bokova

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