

### **Message from Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO on the occasion of International Mother Language Day**

Inclusive Education through and with Language -- Language Matters

*21<sup>st</sup> February 2015*

2015 marks the 15th anniversary of International Mother Language Day – this is also a turning point year for the international community, as the deadline for the Millennium Development Goals, when countries will define a new global sustainable development agenda.

The focus for the post-2015 agenda must fall on the priority of advancing quality education for all -- widening access, ensuring equality and inclusiveness, and promoting education for global citizenship and sustainable development. Education in the mother language is an essential part of achieving these goals -- to facilitate learning and to bolster skills in reading, writing and mathematics. Taking this forward requires a sharper focus on teaching training, revisions of academic programmes and the creation of suitable learning environments.

UNESCO takes forward these goals across the world. In Latin America, with the United Nations Children's Fund, UNESCO is promoting inclusive education through bilingual intercultural approaches, in order

to include both native and non-native cultures. For the same reasons, the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific, based in Bangkok, Thailand, is working to deepen understandings of multilingual education based on the mother tongue, across the region and further afield. Mother tongue education is force for quality learning – it is also essential to bolster multilingualism and respect for linguistic and cultural diversity in societies that are transforming quickly.

Since 2000, there has been tremendous progress to reach the goals of Education for All. Today, we must look ahead – to complete unfinished business and to tackle new challenges. International Mother Language Day is a moment for all of us to raise the flag for the importance of mother tongue to all educational efforts, to enhance the quality of learning and to reach the unreached. Every girl and boy, every woman and man must have the tools to participate fully in the lives of their societies – this is a basic human right and it is a force for the sustainability of all development.