

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

21 February 2017



On the occasion of International Mother Language Day, UNESCO restates its wholehearted commitment to linguistic diversity and multilingualism. Languages express who we are, they structure our thoughts and identities. There can be no authentic dialogue or effective international cooperation without respect for linguistic diversity, which opens up true understanding of every culture. Access to the diversity of languages can awaken the curiosity and mutual understanding of peoples. That is why learning languages are at one and the same time a promise of peace, of innovation and of creativity.

International Mother Language Day, devoted this year to multilingual education, is also an opportunity to mobilize for the Sustainable Development Goals,

and in particular SDG 4, to ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning. Education and information in the mother language is absolutely essential to improving learning and developing confidence and self-esteem, which are among the most powerful engines of development.

We are beings of language. Cultures, ideas, feelings and even aspirations for a better world come to us first and foremost in a specific language, with specific words. These languages convey values and visions of the world that enrich humanity. Giving value to these languages opens up the range of possible futures, and strengthens the energy needed to achieve them. On the occasion of this Day, I launch an appeal for the potential of multilingual education to be acknowledged everywhere, in education and administrative systems, in cultural expressions and the media, cyberspace and trade. The better we understand how to value languages, the more tools we will have to build a future of dignity for all.

*Irina Bokova*