

Multilingual education is 'absolutely essential,' UNESCO chief says on Mother Language Day

21 February 2017 – Learning languages is a promise of peace, innovation and creativity, and will contribute to the achievement of global development goals, the head of the United Nations agency for culture and education has said, marking International Mother Language Day.

“There can be no authentic dialogue or effective international cooperation without respect for linguistic diversity, which opens up true understanding of every culture,” said UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General Irina Bokova in her message on the Day.

“Access to the diversity of languages can awaken the curiosity and mutual understanding of peoples. That is why learning languages is at one and the same time a promise of peace, of innovation and of creativity,” she stated.

This year, the International Day, observed annually on 21 February, is devoted to multilingual education.

Ms. Bokova said the Day is an opportunity to mobilize for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and in particular Goal 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,” she said.

As such, she appealed for the potential of multilingual education to be acknowledged everywhere, in education and administrative systems, in cultural expressions and the media, cyberspace and trade.

International Mother Language Day was proclaimed by UNESCO's General Conference in November 1999, and it has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.