

On International Day, UN promotes online literacy in digital world

8 September 2017 – New technologies open opportunities to improve lives and connect globally, but they can also marginalize those who are illiterate and lack other essential skills needed to navigate them, a senior United Nations official today said, highlighting that some 750 million adults worldwide are not literate.

“Traditionally, literacy has been considered a set of [reading, writing and counting skills](#) applied in a certain context. Digitally-mediated knowledge societies are changing what it means to be literate, calling for new and higher-level literacy skills,” said the Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), Irina Bokova, in her message for International Literacy Day.

Marked annually on 8 September, the International Day this year is devoted to better understanding the type of literacy required in a digital world to build more inclusive, equitable and sustainable societies.

In Paris, opening the International Conference on International Literacy Day, Ms. Bokova today said that technologies must be more accessible and work for people.

“First, they must be inclusive, bridging gaps, not deepening them. Second, they must be underpinned by respect for human rights and dignity. All this gives rise to new questions about the [meaning of literacy](#) today,” she said.

Also speaking at the event, Princess Laurentien of the Netherlands, who is the UNESCO Special Envoy on Literacy for Development, emphasized that literacy in today’s world is at the heart of social participation and engagement.

“There is no inclusiveness if we leave behind 750 million people who lack the basic literacy skills to participate in today’s digital world,” she said. “There is no social cohesion if we allow young people to develop feelings of exclusion and lack of self-confidence.”

Most people who are illiterate around the world – more than 60 per cent – are women, according to UNESCO figures.

As part of this year’s events, UNESCO awarded its annual Confucius Prize for Literacy to The Citizens Foundation, a Pakistani literacy programme with an online platform for women and out-of-school girls. In 2016, the programme enrolled 14,020 girls and women, of whom nearly 80 per cent completed the curricula, per [information](#) on the winning organization. Local communities run nearly all of the Foundation’s 1,440 school units in the poorest slums and villages in the country.

The other winners this year are from Canada, Colombia, Jordan and South

Africa.