

**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the International Day of the World's Indigenous People**

9 August 2006

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People is an opportunity to acknowledge the significant place that indigenous cultures occupy in the world's cultural landscape, and the important contribution they make to our rich cultural diversity, which constitutes the "common heritage of humankind" as defined in the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

Indeed, indigenous cultures are an asset for future generations and a potential source of regeneration. By highlighting the strong ties between culture and nature, tradition and modernity, they provide an inclusive and truly global vision of the world.

The year 2006 has brought good news for the world's indigenous peoples: the long-negotiated text of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the newly established Human Rights Council at its first session in June 2006. The document will be submitted to the United Nations General Assembly later this year, thereby sending out an important message to the international community on indigenous aspirations. It is the responsibility of the United Nations, and notably of UNESCO as a specialized agency for culture, education and communication, to ensure that this message is widely disseminated and well understood throughout the second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (2005-2014), whose main theme is "Partnership for Action and Dignity".

The International Decade's Programme of Action outlines the measures to be undertaken by Member States, the various United Nations agencies, including UNESCO, funding agencies, and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. Among other goals, this agenda includes the promotion, protection and further enhancement of indigenous peoples' cultures, emphasizing the linkages between these cultures and biological diversity, and the crucial importance of developing culturally and linguistically sensitive education programmes and policies aimed at promoting the rights of indigenous peoples.

I am certain that many indigenous organizations shared our great joy at the entry into force of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in April of this year. Moreover, indigenous voices were heard at UNESCO's General Conference in October 2005, on the occasion of the adoption of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of

Cultural Expressions. These two international standard-setting instruments will provide a framework for the protection of traditional indigenous forms of knowledge and cultural expression, as well as for the promotion of contemporary creations by indigenous peoples.

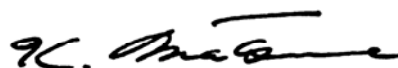
We must also bear in mind that many indigenous organizations attribute great importance to UNESCO's work in the area of cultural landscapes and sacred sites, work that the Organization is committed to pursuing within the larger framework of the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

As custodians of cultural diversity and biodiversity, embodied in natural and cultural heritage – tangible as well as intangible –, indigenous peoples, and particularly women, must be proud of their role as mediators in the safeguarding and transmission of traditional knowledge, while taking their rightful place in a globalized world.

If the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to benefit indigenous peoples, cultural diversity and dialogue between indigenous societies and States need to be recognized as driving forces for sustainable development, “understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence” (Art. 3, UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001).

As the Programme of Action of the second International Decade of the World's Indigenous People affirms, in order to achieve the MDGs it is essential to improve the mechanisms for the consultation of indigenous communities and to ensure the latter's participation in projects undertaken in UNESCO's fields of competence, with the free and prior consent of the concerned parties.

The International Day of the World's Indigenous People is a time to reflect on the strategies for promoting the second Decade. This year, I would like to remind all stakeholders that the successful implementation of the Decade's Programme of Action will require special knowledge and competency to deal constructively with “otherness”. To this end, new expertise in intercultural communication must be developed at both the individual and group level, as well as at the level of institutions and decision-making bodies, so that indigenous and non-indigenous partners can engage in genuine dialogue, the main guarantee of a common sustainable future.



Koichiro Matsuura