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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of International Literacy Day

Literacy in a digital world

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Digital technologies permeate all spheres of our lives, fundamentally shaping how we live, work, learn and socialize.

These new technologies are opening vast new opportunities to improve our lives and connect globally -- but they can also marginalize those who lack the essential skills, like literacy, needed to navigate them.

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. At the same time, in return, technology can work to improve literacy development.

This must be understood in the wider context. Worldwide, 750 million adults today still lack even the most basic literacy skills. Some 264 million children and youth are not benefiting from school education. Furthermore, international surveys show that a large share of adult and youth populations all over the world, including developed countries, are inadequately equipped with the basic digital skills required to function fully in today's societies and workplace. Narrowing this skills gap is an educational and developmental imperative.

Information and communication technologies are creating opportunities to address this challenge. Digital tools can help expand access to learning and improve its quality. They have the power to reach the unreached, improve the monitoring of literacy progress, facilitate skills assessment, and make the management and governance of skills delivery systems more efficient.

To create and seize new opportunities to take forward Sustainable Development Goal 4 on Education and lifelong learning for all, we need collective action. Partnerships between governments, civil society and the private sector are essential today to promote literacy in a digital world. I see the *Global Alliance for Literacy within a Lifelong Learning Framework* as a model of the concerted efforts we need to advance the global agenda and support national literacy initiatives.

International Literacy Day offers a moment to review the progress and come together to tackle the challenges ahead. This year, the event is devoted to better understanding the type of literacy required in a digital world to build more inclusive, equitable and sustainable societies. Everyone should be able to make the most of the benefits of the new digital age, for human rights, for dialogue and exchange, for more sustainable development.

Irina Bokova