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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,

Director-General of UNESCO,

on the occasion of World Book and Copyright Day

23 April 2021

In this period of uncertainty, many people are turning to books to help them escape lockdown and cope with anxiety.

Indeed, books have the unique ability both to entertain and to teach. They are a means of exploring realms beyond our personal experience through exposure to different authors, ideas and cultures. They are a means of accessing the deepest places in our minds. Page by page, books light a path for us to roam, unbound by time or borders. In other words, books give us freedom.

It is the power of books that we all need right now, as we are reminded of the fundamental importance of literature – as well as the arts – in our lives.

In celebrating books, we are also celebrating their authors, who provide us with snippets of life and insights into other realities. They open a window onto the world – more precisely, a window onto other worlds and other forms of existence. And for this reason, every year on 23 April -- the day on which the honourable authors William Shakespeare, Miguel de Cervantes and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega passed away – we celebrate writers whose works have been captivating our imagination for centuries.

Today, we also pay homage to all the professions associated with books: editing, translation, publishing and book selling. These fields make it possible to disseminate our literary heritage, to allow for the expression of new ideas, and to enable the spread of stories.

These professions must be protected and their value acknowledged. This is all the more relevant in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, which poses a deep and lasting threat to culture.

This is why UNESCO is supporting the work of publishers through undertakings such as its partnerships with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the International Publishers Association (IPA).

The power of books must be fully harnessed. We must ensure their access so that everyone can take refuge in reading, and by doing so, be able to dream, learn and reflect. This is the significance of the commitment made by Tbilisi, Georgia, which becomes the 2021 World Book Capital on 23 April. UNESCO designated this city because of its focus on the use of modern technologies to promote reading among young people. Their programme “*Ok. So your next book is...?*” has worked to transform books into digital games and helped ensure access to all.

At a time when reading is invaluable, the importance of our commitment to integration, education and peace in and through reading becomes crystal clear.

For this year's edition of World Book and Copyright Day, I therefore encourage each and every one of you to pick up a book, start turning its pages, and draw from it a breath of fresh air, which will help sustain you now and in the future.