



**CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO
COMMISSION CANADIENNE POUR L'UNESCO**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY 2006 PROMOTES THE ROLE OF
LITERACY IN DEVELOPMENT**

Ottawa, September 8, 2006 *Literacy Sustains Development* is the theme of this year's International Literacy Day, celebrated around the world on September 8. The chosen theme emphasizes the importance of literacy and life-long learning in building sustainable communities.

In his message on International Literacy Day, the Director-General of UNESCO Koïchiro Matsuura noted that considerable achievements have been made in many countries in primary education as well as in adult literacy, but that tremendous challenges still remain. He added, "Literacy is widely acknowledged as one of the most powerful tools of development, which makes its relative neglect all the more frustrating." An estimated 771 million adults around the world live without basic literacy skills and two-thirds of them are women. Over 100 million children are still not enrolled in primary school and more than half of them are girls. Moreover, the sustainability of literacy is not assured as drop-out rates remain high and literacy must be constantly reinforced if it is to be retained.

David A. Walden, Secretary-General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, stressed that "the annual celebration of International Literacy Day is an opportunity to remind the world of the importance of literacy for individuals and whole societies. On this day we pay tribute to the achievements of the individuals and groups within Canada around the world who promote literacy and help their fellow citizens to achieve it."

The United Nations has declared the period 2003-2012 as the UN Literacy Decade, emphasizing the importance of the multiple forms of literacy that exist in the workplace, the community and society. These literacy needs must be addressed in the contexts of language, culture and the economic development of the country and internationally.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the only organization within the United Nations system with a mandate for education. The right to education is a fundamental human right and equal access to education is central to UNESCO's mandate and activities.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO operates under the aegis of the Canada Council for the Arts. Its role is to act as a forum for governments and civil society, and to mobilize the participation of Canadian organizations and committed individuals in UNESCO's mandated areas: education, natural and social sciences, culture and communication and information.

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