



CANADIAN COMMISSION FOR UNESCO
COMMISSION CANADIENNE POUR L'UNESCO

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**NEWS RELEASE
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INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY 2008 LINKS LITERACY AND HEALTH

Ottawa, September 8, 2008. *Literacy is the best remedy* is the theme of this year's International Literacy Day, celebrated annually around the world on September 8. The chosen theme puts the spotlight on the connections between people's level of literacy and their chances to maintain good health.

In his message on International Literacy Day, UNESCO's Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura stated, "Today's gravest health concerns cannot be adequately addressed unless literacy finds a central place in public health policies and strategies. An illiterate person is simply more vulnerable to ill-health, and less likely to seek medical help for themselves, their family or their community."

While progress has been made over the past decade, some 774 million people, roughly one out of five adults in the world, can still neither read nor write, and 75 million children remain excluded from the educational system.

David A. Walden, Secretary-General of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, noted, "The annual celebration of International Literacy Day is an opportunity to remind the world of the importance of literacy for individuals and societies. The ability to read is essential for people to combat poverty and diseases such as malaria and HIV-AIDS. On this day we salute the individuals and groups within Canada and 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 context of language, culture and the economic development of individual countries as well as 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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For more information, contact:

Shery Alexander Heinis
Programme Officer, Education
Canadian Commission for UNESCO
1-800-263-5588, or 613-566-4414, ext. 5566
shery.alexander-heinis@unesco.ca