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UNU/UNESCO Globalization Conference Will Focus on Languages

- Event:** UNU/UNESCO International Conference on “Globalization and Languages: Building on Our Rich Heritage”
- Date/Time:** 27 & 28 August 2008 (Wed. & Thurs.)
- Venue:** United Nations University Headquarters (Shibuya-ku, Tokyo)
- Organizers:** United Nations University (UNU) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- Co-Organizer:** Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU)
- Supporters:** Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MoFA); Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan (MEXT); and Japanese National Commission for UNESCO (JNCU)
- Website:** www.unu.edu/globalization/

Background and objectives

In May 2007 the United Nations General Assembly recognized that “genuine multilingualism promotes unity in diversity and international understanding” and proclaimed 2008 the International Year of Languages.

Just as plant and animal species can become extinct, many of the world’s languages are dying. Language is the means by which the present can access the knowledge and wisdom of the past, and every language that disappears disrupts this transmission of knowledge, endangers indigenous cultures and heritages, and weakens human culture as a whole.

Furthermore, languages play a significant, though widely ignored, role in humanity’s efforts to achieve sustainable development, alleviate poverty, and live in peace. A major challenge and important requirement of globalization will be to preserve and promote linguistic diversity, especially of minority and endangered languages.

This year’s UNU/UNESCO international conference (the sixth in an annual series on the effects of globalization) will examine the challenges and opportunities that globalization presents to languages and multilingualism and will identify effective strategies and policies to ensure the continued viability of the world’s languages and the fostering of linguistic diversity in society.

About the Conference

- During the conference, eminent experts from around the world will discuss the critical role of languages in attaining internationally agreed-upon development goals (such as the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All), promoting cultural diversity, and achieving constructive dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples. Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura will also be present for the opening remark and the introduction.

MEDIA ADVISORY

The morning of Day One will feature four keynote presentations, delivered by:

- Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, Former President of the Republic of Iceland and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Languages
 - Olabiyi Babalola Joseph Yaï, Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO, and Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Benin to UNESCO
 - Stephen May, Professor and Chair of Language and Literacy Education, University of Waikato, New Zealand
 - Adama Samassékou, Executive Secretary of the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN), and President of Maaya Network
- On the afternoon of Day One, there will be three consecutive panel discussions focusing on the themes of “Multilingualism, Translation, Communication and Literacy”, “Education and Learning”, and “Safeguarding Endangered Languages.
 - The morning of Day Two will feature an additional panel discussion focusing on “Standard-setting Instruments” followed by a brief pre-workshop plenary session.
 - On the afternoon of Day Two, there will be a workshop comprising four concurrent working group sessions. In these sessions, participants will explore key issues relating to the four panel discussion themes in more depth. The working group sessions will be followed by a concluding plenary session.
 - Simultaneous Japanese–English–French interpretation will be provided for the plenary sessions (keynote presentations and panel discussions). The workshop sessions on the afternoon of Day Two will be conducted in English.
 - A full programme, profiles of the speakers and panellists, and other information about the conference are available online on the conference website at <www.unu.edu/globalization/>.
 - For those unable to attend, the conference will be webcast live (and archived) on the website.

Media representatives are cordially invited to attend the 2008 UNU/UNESCO International Conference. Please contact Naoko Yano, UNU Office of Communications (tel: 03-5467-1311; e-mail: media@unu.edu) to confirm your attendance.