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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 International Literacy Day

8 September 2020

In celebrating International Literacy Day, we recall the fundamental right of everyone to develop the basic skills to read the world and write its future.

“Literacy”, said Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, “is the key to delivering the potential of every human being; the key to opening up a future of freedom and hope.”

However, despite UNESCO’s continued commitment, historic literacy campaigns, national investment and the immense progress made by the majority of countries, despite the tenacity of all those who work daily for literacy, too many children, adolescents and adults are still deprived of this right.

Some 617 million young people have not mastered basic literacy and numeracy skills – yet many of them are in school. There are a further 773 million illiterate adults, who are too often left behind. We must therefore redouble our efforts for these 1.4 billion people.

This is all the more necessary as the educational crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has jeopardized the progress made in recent decades.

To overcome its consequences and continue to move forward, we need to focus on those who are on the front line: educators. We have seen their dedication during this unprecedented situation, but we have also witnessed their insecurity and deprivation, since the daily work of teaching literacy, however essential it is, receives too little recognition and support.

The first challenge is therefore to ensure that educators everywhere in the world are able to carry out their work under good conditions: by increasing their numbers to meet needs, by paying them fairly and by providing them with job stability.

We also need to empower them, however, by training them and supporting them throughout their practice. They must be able to benefit from proven educational methods that aim to tackle the inequalities linked to age, gender or specific vulnerabilities.

This support must continue throughout their practice to enable them to develop and adapt in all circumstances - particularly in the face of upheavals such as school closures. With two out of every three students in the world still unable to go back to school, widespread training of educators in distance education solutions is essential.

This exceptional situation has revealed, in particular, the full potential of new technologies. While these tools cannot replace the transmission of knowledge by humans, they can nonetheless be valuable allies. We must support their development and make them accessible to all learners – this will be an important aspect of our reflection on the Futures of Education.

At a time when we need to reinvent a world of hope, literacy is more important than ever.

On this International Day, I thus invite all those involved in education to redouble their investments and mobilize all their resources to unleash the potential of each individual in the service of a shared world.