



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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Subject: **World Digital Library**

Sir/Madam,

On behalf of UNESCO and the Library of Congress, I am pleased to inform you of the launch of the World Digital Library (WDL), which will take place at UNESCO Headquarters on 21 April 2009. The launch event will be a unique occasion to encourage the participation of institutions from every Member State in this exciting project.

In June 2005, the Librarian of the U.S. Congress, Mr James H. Billington, contacted UNESCO to propose the creation of a World Digital Library with the support of the United States National Commission for UNESCO. UNESCO welcomed this initiative as an important contribution to its strategic objectives of promoting universal access to information and knowledge, promoting the expression of pluralism and cultural diversity on the Internet, enhancing scientific, technical and human capacities to participate in the emerging knowledge societies, and enhancing the linkages between culture and development through capacity-building and sharing of knowledge.

Over the last three years, UNESCO, the Library of Congress, and individuals and institutions from many Member States have worked together – on the policy and strategic levels, in expert meetings, and technical and content working groups – to begin translating a vision into reality through the development of a prototype. The initial results of this effort will be apparent in April, when the website of the World Digital Library is launched for free, non-commercial use by the public worldwide.

In addition to marking the completion of this first stage of the project, the launch event will initiate a discussion among Member States about how to carry this initiative forward in the coming years. As its key objective is to promote the cultural heritage and achievements of all Member States, the cooperation of cultural institutions is crucial. We will be also seeking to develop synergies between this initiative and UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme, including by using the WDL to make digital versions of Memory of the World collections publicly accessible.

An invitation to the World Digital Library launch will be sent out shortly, and I hope that your country will be represented at the event. On that occasion, WDL staff will be available to discuss how cultural institutions might best contribute to, and benefit from, the project. For further information, the WDL project can be contacted at info@worlddigitallibrary.org.

Please accept, Sir/Madam, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General

cc: Permanent Delegations to UNESCO
National Commissions for UNESCO

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