



The Holy See

**MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS,
SIGNED BY CARDINAL SECRETARY OF STATE PIETRO PAROLIN,
ON THE OCCASION OF INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY 2024**

[Yaoundé (Cameroon), 9 - 10 September 2024]

Mrs Audrey Azoulay
Director-General of UNESCO
Paris

On the occasion of International Literacy Day 2024, to be celebrated in Yaoundé on 9 and 10 September, His Holiness Pope Francis sends cordial greetings to the organizers and all taking part in this global event sponsored by UNESCO in cooperation with the Government of Cameroon. Celebrated yearly since 1967, International Literacy Day offers us a welcome opportunity to take stock of the results achieved in the fight against illiteracy and to encourage the individuals and institutions engaged in the invaluable service of continuing education.

The theme chosen for this year's event, *Promoting Multilingual Education: Literacy for Mutual Understanding and Peace*, is an invitation to reflect more deeply on the role of literacy in bringing peoples together and advancing mutual understanding. In this regard, the Holy See gladly renews its appreciation of the contribution made by UNESCO in promoting linguistic and cultural diversity, and indeed multilingualism.

Multilingualism is increasingly being recognized as a factor favouring personal growth and development, particularly by expanding knowledge and fostering openness to other peoples and different cultures, but also by encouraging dialogue, listening and mediation. Polyglots are often in demand precisely because, in addition to their ability to understand and speak several languages, they tend to have finer analytical abilities, better communication and social skills, and a greater aptitude for discernment. In this sense, they are better equipped to appreciate the richness of other cultures, including those far removed from their own.

Nelson Mandela once said, “If you speak to a man in a language he understands, you speak to his mind. If you speak to him in his own language, you speak to his heart”. Language is essential for communication between individuals and peoples. Helping people, and their future leaders, to become familiar with several languages translates into providing our human family with bridge-builders, capable of overcoming prejudices, differences, antagonisms and forms of polarization in order to give priority to dialogue and encounter. It means training people who know how to speak not only to the minds but also to the hearts of their interlocutors, whether allies or adversaries.

Once again this year, the Holy Father calls upon political decision-makers, educators and the general public to appreciate more deeply the vital role played by literacy in the building of a more educated, fraternal, supportive and peaceful society. Echoing the words of [Saint John Paul II](#), he trusts that “people, freed from fear and the threat of potentially apocalyptic armed conflicts, will learn not to oppose one another but to intensify the bonds of fraternity uniting them, thanks to the means of communication offered by modern civilization”. [\[1\]](#)

With these sentiments, His Holiness sends his prayerful good wishes for this year’s celebration. Upon you and your co-workers, and upon all the members of the networks involved in promoting literacy, intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding between peoples, he invokes God’s abundant blessings.

In conveying this Message to you, Madam Director-General, I have the honour to remain,

Yours sincerely,

Cardinal Pietro Parolin
Secretary of State of His Holiness

[\[1\]](#) Cf. POPE JOHN PAUL II, [Message for the 20th International Literacy Day](#), 1 September 1986.