

PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

International Literacy Day Highlights UNESCO's Commitment to Reducing Illiteracy in Iraq by 50% by 2015

Baghdad – Amman, 8 September 2009: On International Literacy Day, UNESCO stressed the importance of promoting literacy in Iraq as a tool for individual empowerment, social development, and peace building.

"This year, International Literacy Day puts the spotlight on the empowering role of literacy and its importance for participation, citizenship and development. 'Literacy and Empowerment' is the theme for the 2009-2010 biennium of the UN Literacy Decade (2003-2012)," highlighted Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO.

To mark the occasion and raise awareness, UNESCO Iraq organised a number of events in partnership with the Ministry of Education and NGOs in different parts of Iraq. The activities included roundtables on this year's global theme "The Power of Literacy," awards to the best literacy stories of neo-literates, spots on the UNESCO supported educational TV and distribution of public information material to literacy centres, schools and learners.

In Iraq, an estimated five million people are illiterate; this includes 14% of school age children who are currently out of school, because they have no access to suitable schooling or are obliged to contribute to household income. The Iraqi adult illiteracy rate is now one of the highest in the Arab region, particularly in rural areas, where almost 30% of the population is unable to read or write. Significant gender disparities are also a matter of concern with illiteracy rates higher than 40% among women.

"Literacy is a basic human right. It is a tool to achieve empowerment and contributes to economic and human development in Iraq," said Mohamed Djelid, Director of the UNESCO Iraq Office. "The Government of Iraq is committed to address the challenges of a rising rate of illiteracy by launching a national literacy campaign. To this end, UNESCO and the Government of Iraq have signed a Memorandum of Understanding and it is our top priority to assist the Government of Iraq to achieve the Education for All (EFA) goal of reducing illiteracy by 50% by 2015," he added.

UNESCO is working in close cooperation with the relevant national stakeholders, including the Ministries of Education in Baghdad and Kurdistan, the Parliament, the Directorates of Education, civil society organizations, NGOs and local community leaders to increase quality of and access to literacy programs at national level.

For further information please contact:

Alberto Biancoli, Education Project Officer, UNESCO Iraq Office, a.biancoli@unesco.org
Tel +962 59 02 340