

Poetry gives us hope to scale and climb 'cloudy summits of our time' – UN cultural agency

21 March 2017 – Poetry gives us hope, the United Nations cultural agency today said, lauding verse's ability to shake us from everyday life and remind us of the surrounding beauty and the resilience of the shared human spirit.

In her message for World Poetry Day, UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Director-General Irina Bokova quoted from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow:

We have not wings, we cannot soar;

But we have feet to scale and climb

By slow degrees, by more and more,

The cloudy summits of our time.

"As old as language itself, poetry remains more vital than ever, in a time of turbulence, as a source of hope, as a way to share what it means to live in this world," Ms. Bokova said.

"By celebrating poetry today, we celebrate our ability to join together, in a spirit of solidarity, to scale and climb 'the cloudy summits of our time'," she noted, in reference to Mr. Longfellow's poem.

UNESCO proclaimed 21 March as World Poetry Day in 1999, calling poetry a "social need" which anchors people to their roots.

One of the main objectives of the Day is to support linguistic diversity through poetic expression and to offer endangered languages the opportunity to be heard within their communities.

UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity includes dozens of forms of oral expression and poetry, from the Tsiattista poetic duelling of Cyprus, the Ca trù sung poetry of Viet Nam and Al-Taghrooda to the traditional Bedouin chanted poetry of Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

World Poetry Day also celebrates poetry's power to aid peace. UNESCO's new Goodwill Ambassador for Artistic Freedom and Creativity, Deeyah Khan, has said, all art, including poetry, "has the extraordinary capacity to express resistance and rebellion, protest and hope."

In her message today, the Director-General said that the spirit of solidarity created by poetry is essential to reaching the goals set by the international community to fight inequality, poverty and climate change.

“We need this to take forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to implement the Paris Climate Agreement, to ensure no woman or man is left behind,” said Ms. Bokova.