Report from Multi-stakeholder Event

Round table Report: "For a Multilingual Cyberspace with the Participation of All in the Information and Shared Knowledge Society"

Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honor to take the floor to present a report of the round table titled "For a Multilingual Cyberspace with the Participation of All in the Information and Shared Knowledge Society," organized by the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) and the E-Africa Commission of NEPAD, in partnership with UNESCO, the *Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie* (AIF), ITU, the *Union latina*, the International Literacy Institute of the University of Pennsylvania (ILI), the SIL International, FUNREDES, Multilingual Internet Names Consortium (MINC), the *Casa de les Llengües of Catalunya*, the *Language Observatory Project* (LOP), Unicode IDN in Africa, and ICVolunteers, under the auspices of the African Union."

I had the great honor to open together with Mr. Adama Samassékou of ACALAN this meeting on cultural and linguistic diversity in cyberspace, which is the continuation of a thematic conference held in Bamako (Mali) from 6 to 7 May 2005.

Today, I am happy to announce the creation of an international multi-stakeholder network of organizations committed to promoting linguistic and cultural diversity ensuring the participation of All in the Information and Shared Knowledge Society.

The round table was structured into three sessions, each of which had a specific objective. The first one allowed UNESCO to present the conclusions of the Bamako Conference.

The second, permitted to share successful innovative experiences of the use of languages currently less represented on the Internet, covering the different regions of the world, in order to ensure their promotion and presence in cyberspace. Theses show-cases included projects focusing on the development of fonts and keyboards that respect UNICODE standards for language specific scripts, encouraging the use of open source software solutions, and presenting experiences of translation, the transmission of oral languages in cyberspace and e-teaching of multiple languages.

The last session, which was the most important of all, was the occasion to officially create a network, involving governmental organizations, universities, non-governmental organizations, companies and structures focusing on linguistics, culture, international cooperation and business.

It is important to emphasize that this network has been created during the African Week of ICTs (14 to 20 November), launched this year by the African Union Commission. Its seeds being laid, the official launch will take place on 21 February 2006 at UNESCO headquarters, on the occasion of

the International Mother Tongue Day. Before this date, all the institutions which were not able to take part in the round table are invited to join. Last but not least, it is important to stress that the launch of the network coincides with the Year of African Languages 2006 decided by the African Union.

It is our hopes that this innovative initiative, taken by the continent which most needs to value its languages, can contribute to a more inclusive cyberspace, in which not only 200 of the 6000 languages of our world are represented, but as many of them as possible, reflecting the true cultural diversity of our planet. If we live in a globalized world, we do not live in one that is one-dimensional, but rather one

- where all the cultures of this world, embedded in various languages, should be represented in cyberspace;

- where all children should be able to study in their mother tongue before learning other languages; and

- where language is not only a tool for communication, but the expression of cultural identity, diversity, leading to a true dialogue between cultures and civilizations.

It is our hopes that as many entities and networks will join this initiative in order to give it the dimension and scope it deserves.

Thank you.