



United Nations senior officials highlighted the role of literacy in achieving a more sustainable future, stressing that knowledge can help combat poverty and improve people's livelihoods.

“In our knowledge-based era, literacy is a foundation for a more just, inclusive and sustainable world,” [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon said in his message for World Literacy Day.

“Literacy enables people to gain access to information to improve their health and nutrition, widen their livelihood options, cope with environmental change and make informed choices,” the Secretary-General said on the Day, observed annually on 8 September

There are more than 773 million young people and adults around the world who cannot read. Worldwide, at least 250 million children of primary school age cannot read, write or count. Two thirds of them are women.

Mr. Ban underlined the importance of investing in education, noting this is an investment in human dignity, development and peace.

“I urge all countries to make education and literacy national priorities and to work with partners across society to advance these goals. By promoting literacy, we can help millions of people write their own chapter of opportunity in their lives and our common future.”

The [latest data](#) from the UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization ( [UNESCO](#) ) Institute for Statistics shows that most of the world's illiterate adults live in South and West Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Illiteracy also remains a persistent problem in developed countries, with UNESCO data showing that one in five young people in Europe had poor literacy skills in 2009, and some 160 million adults in countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and development (OECD) are functionally illiterate, which means that they do not have the skills needed to function in today's environments such as the ability to fill out forms, follow instructions, read a map, or help with their children with homework.

This year's theme for the Day was “Literacies for the 21st century,” chosen to highlight the evolving range of literacy skills required to full participate in today's connected societies.

“Literacy is the first condition for dialogue, communication and integration into new connected societies,” said UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova in her message for the Day.

“Young people need new skills to enter and succeed in the job market: knowledge of several languages, understanding of cultural diversity, lifelong learning. Literacy is the key for acquiring knowledge, interpersonal skills, expertise and the ability to live together in community – all skills that are the foundations of modern society.”

To mark the Day, an international colloquium is being held at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, bringing together ministers and deputy ministers of education, development and culture from Afghanistan, Benin, the Republic of Chad, India, Namibia, Pakistan and Senegal, along with

representatives from other civil society working in education and literacy, and the private sector.

UNESCO will also honour the winners of its annual literary prize. This year's awards are being presented to winners from Bangladesh, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, India and Namibia.

**Source:** [UN News Centre](#)