

23 April 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jan Kavan,
President of the 57th Session of the General Assembly,
on World Book and Copyright Day**

Each year since 1996, we celebrate World Book and Copyright Day on 23 April. This date was selected by UNESCO in homage to the universally read and extraordinary authors Miguel de Cervantes, William Shakespeare and Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. All of them had died on this day in the year 1616.

While the use of computers and internet proliferates, and the texts of books can be copied onto discs and cassettes, a major part of the developing world still depends on printed books. The written word and books have been precious tools for documenting and transmission of learning and knowledge through generations, of recording mankind's history and social mores, our cultural heritage, of promulgating our life sustaining value systems, for enabling us to chronicle cumulative knowledge in our quest to understand man and the universe around him. Each recorded piece of information has allowed the succeeding generations to add to it instead of rediscovering it, and thus mankind has progressed to our present level of technologically advanced civilization.

In the Czech Republic, of which I am a citizen, in homage to authors who influenced and inspired the ordinary citizen in the struggle for freedom and personal liberty, we established a tradition of an annual reading marathon for 4 days during which excerpts are read from books around the world on a particular theme. This marathon is broadcast live on the internet and any citizen may participate. This year's theme is Life in Truth - Homage to Vaclav Havel, and under my sponsorship, we will celebrate part of the reading marathon on 27 May, for one day at the United Nations.

It is important to recognize and respect the legal protection accorded to the intellectual property of authors to continue to motivate the creativity of the human mind. The Bern Convention together with WIPO Copyright Treaty (WCT) of 1971 and December 1996 respectively, constitute such protection.

UNESCO has made great strides in promoting books and their translation into various languages. UNESCO has created a valuable international bibliography of translations and is currently promoting books in Africa, Asia and the Arab Region through joint projects. Thus the United Nations system has played a crucial role in promoting copyright protection for the authors and artists and researchers in all fields.

I hope that on the World Book and Copyright Day, UNESCO's comprehensive guidelines to the mass media, publishers, teachers and libraries are followed to popularize the idea of books and reading.