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BAMAKO INTERNATIONAL FORUM ON MULTILINGUALISM

Bamako, Hotel Salam, January 19-21 2009

BAMAKO COMMITMENT ON UNIVERSAL MULTILINGUALISM

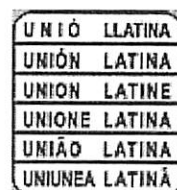


2008 – International Year of Languages

Bundesministerium für
Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur

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ORGANISATION
INTERNATIONALE DE
la francophonie



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We, the participants at the Bamako International Forum on Multilingualism (BIFM), representing governments, international organisations, civil society, and the private sector, meeting in Bamako from January 19 to 21 2009, to celebrate multilingualism and the International Year of Languages (IYL), and strengthen the promotion of languages in the world,

1. Considering:

The existence of a large number of reference texts on multilingualism, linguistic diversity, and their importance for humanity and human societies, including:

- The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- Article 30 of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Article 19 of the Vienna Declaration, adopted at the World Conference on Human Rights, affirming the rights of “persons belonging to minorities to use their own language”;
- The 1995 Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities;
- The 1996 Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights, signed in Barcelona;
- The World Summit on the Information Society’s 2003 and 2005 Recommendations on the Promotion and Use of Multilingualism and Universal Access to Cyberspace;
- The 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions;
- The 1998 Council of Europe’s European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
- The December 1999 call of the United Nations General Assembly for more attention to multilingualism;
- The 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and its Action Plan;
- The Language Plan of Action for Africa, revised in Khartoum in January 2006;
- The United Nations Resolution declaring 2008 the International Year of Languages, adopted in New York in 2007;
- The European Union Council Resolution on a European Strategy for Multilingualism, adopted in Brussels in December 2008.

Multilingualism

2. Aware:

- That we live in an essentially multilingual world;
- That multilingualism is the norm and is increasingly so due to migratory flows;
- That languages, as the foundation stone of individual and collective identities, are the vectors of the values of democracy, fundamental human rights, the rule of law, and universal peace and dialogue;
- That in economic, political, and socio-cultural terms, History shows no example of countries that have developed without their languages, in particular without their introduction into the educational systems;
- That linguistic diversity is to human society what biodiversity is to nature, and that as such it is a factor for mutual enrichment, rapprochement, and inter-cultural dialogue;
- That each language is a window open onto the world;
- That every language community should have the right to manage its own resources with a view to ensuring the use of its language in all areas of public life;
- That the mother tongue has an irreplaceable role and place as a language for learning;

We call on governments to commit further to a societal project based on linguistic and cultural pluralism:

- Multilingualism and linguistic diversity represent a challenge in building societies that are founded on democratic participation of citizens, and in access to education, culture, and knowledge.
- Experience shows that social cohesion, peace, and cultural, social, and economic development are part of a societal project that is based on equitable and mutually enriching partnerships among all languages and ethno-linguistic communities, and not part of a policy of exclusion and assimilation, which constitutes an infringement and a violation of the ethics of ethno-linguistic identity.
- Multilingualism in a democratic structure is a fundamental condition for effective and equitable participation of citizens in the public space, at local, national, and regional levels, as well as globally, which is the key to inclusion and thus to democracy.
- Linguistic diversity must therefore remain a fundamental and vital factor for progress in societies, as it is a component of the very survival of our species, which is in turn dependent on the diversity of the chain that links the biological to the cultural, in the face of changes that could threaten the biosphere of our planet.

Multilingualism and education

3. Noting:

- The absence, in certain countries, of clear language policies concerning national languages in all sectors of life in general and in education in particular;
- That the absence, in certain countries, of clear language policies concerning national languages in all sectors of life in general and in education in particular constitutes a major handicap in the process of enabling populations to control their environment in the broadest sense of the term, that is their development, and thus undermines the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);
- That there is a gap, in certain countries, between existing policies and their application;
- That in certain countries, mother tongue-based education is still not provided;
- That in many cases, the dominant foreign language or languages are replacing local languages;
- That, in certain cases, the methodology of mother tongue-based multilingual education is not well defined, teaching aids are not perfected, and teachers are not adequately trained;
- That there is a scarcity of financial resources, due to the lack of commitment on the part of government authorities to mother tongue-based multilingual education;
- That many citizens have negative attitudes towards their mother tongue and that this promotes the use of a foreign language instead of local languages;
- That there is no mechanism for sharing knowledge about effective and successful experience in multilingual education;
- That marginalised communities and indigenous people have an inalienable right to exist as a language community;
- That throughout the world, wherever education does not start with the languages that children use at home, there are difficulties and a degree of ineffectiveness that together, in the long run, lead them to fail and drop out of school;
- That every individual has the right to express him/herself in, and have access to education in their mother language;

We call on governments to adopt and generalise the principle of Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MT-based MLE):

- Mother tongue-based multilingual education is the manifestation of an equitable partnership between local languages and the dominant [foreign and international] language or languages in national education systems. MT-based MLE thus guarantees that the mother tongue of the learner is taken into account alongside the other languages in the educational system, in compliance with the principles of multilingualism and linguistic diversity recommended by UNESCO, to promote the development of children as agents of national advancement.
- Education is an essential investment in the training of the human resources required for the cultural, social, economic, and political transformation of a nation.
- Thus multilingual schooling is a recognised tool for promoting the cognitive development of children, on condition that it is additive, and based on the mother language.

We reaffirm, in line with linguistic human rights:

- The right of every individual to use the language in which they have core competence, in all areas of public life.
- The right of every individual to have access to knowledge, and/or participate in knowledge sharing in their language of initial competence.
- The right of every individual to use their language of competence in a national, regional, or international forum.
- Only mother tongue-based multilingual education, in partnership with other languages of international dimension, is capable of guaranteeing rapid academic, intellectual, and professional development, as well as the ability of the products of the educational system to face up to the challenges of globalisation.

For this reason, we call on governments of the countries concerned, to resolutely commit to the implementation of a policy of mother tongue-based multilingual education, a sine qua non condition for attaining the Millennium Development Goals, and quality Education for All.

Multilingualism and Cyberspace

4. Aware

- That it is important to ensure the presence and use of all languages in cyberspace, in order to create inclusive knowledge societies that respect cultural diversity, and where information and knowledge are accessible to, and shared by all.

5. Convinced

- That a multilingual cyberspace contributes to the preservation of endangered languages through broader use of all languages;
- That a multilingual cyberspace allows a much broader population than ever before to participate in extending the basis of human knowledge in all areas of human activity, as well as in sharing knowledge and contributing to its growth and application to education, health, and science;
- That a multilingual cyberspace holds an enormous potential for educating every individual on a culture of information, by broadening access to education and facilitating the production and availability of small-scale teaching aids, in particular for endangered languages;
- That Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), in particular the Internet, occupy an increasingly large place in communication and knowledge exchange;
- That the large number of Internet users (almost two billions) enables this tool to promote multilingualism;
- That the divide, in terms of content, is essentially a cultural and linguistic divide;
- That Internet access is only one component among others, and that there is a tendency to neglect the underlying reality of content, which is the basis of digital literacy;
- That cyberspace must reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of our planet and should also contribute to preserving the memory of extinct languages and cultures and those in danger of extinction;
- That according the right place to languages in cyberspace is a factor for stabilising and promoting peace;

We call on governments to promote multilingualism in cyberspace, while recognising:

- That the vital role played by ICT-based communication and knowledge exchange, in particular the Internet, in the construction of new forms of society, clearly points to the importance for people, ideas, cultures, and languages, of being present in the digital world through content that is organised as access on the network;
- That indicators show that the digital divide is even more pronounced in terms of content than in terms of access, and that it is a cultural and linguistic divide that reveals the dangers of acculturation through the digital sphere. That beyond ensuring mass access, there is therefore a need to foster the creation of large quantities of local content with coverage that is proportionately comparable to the number of speakers of each language;
- That, to date, digital integration has mainly been focused on access; that it is time to reorient the priorities and in addition to policies on access, adopt policies on content that take equitable account of diversity and include the indispensable aspects of education on the digital culture and the ethics of information, in order to ensure an enduring movement;
- That taking linguistic diversity into account in the digital world represents enormous challenges, both in technical and financial terms, and that these can only be overcome through a step-by-step approach, applied in consultation with actors from all sectors, and with coordination among the local, national, regional, and international levels, because although language technologies have a central role to play, certain stages belong to the non-virtual world;
- That governance provides a wonderful opportunity for catalysing expressions of needs and spurring the interest of the populations that are most directly involved, and that open content and freeware are vital to multilingualism in the digital world;
- That cyberspace must reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of our planet and can also contribute to preserving the memory of extinct languages and cultures and the survival of those in danger of extinction, and that the real **global lingua franca** is widespread, technology-assisted translation, which, to be effective, requires that all languages be integrated throughout the chain that constitutes the digital world: from coding through processing software, and up to content creation and indexing for searches.

6. We thus reiterate our commitment and determination to develop and promote multilingualism as the foundation for the uniqueness of human communication.

7. We further reiterate our conviction that multilingualism in itself is not a source of conflict among peoples, but can rather serve to promote peace and dialogue among cultures and civilisations.

8. We encourage governments, international organisations, the private sector, and civil society, to adopt and implement policies that promote equitable multilingualism and to observe the following principles:

- The fundamental equality of all languages, including sign language.
- Promotion of the equitable use of all languages within the framework of a functional, user-friendly multilingualism.
- Protection of all languages from anything that threatens their existence, in particular with relation to the balance of powers inherent in the new language markets.
- Respect of new forms of linguistic expression in order to guarantee full enjoyment of citizens' rights for all.

9. We undertake to contribute to the implementation of national policies in favour of mother tongue-based multilingual education.

10. We reiterate our commitment to contributing to the building of a multilingual cyberspace that enables the harmonious and balanced development of local, national, and international languages.

Bamako, January 21 2009

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Bamako commitment on universal
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