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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Video message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the Symposium “Permanence of
Yiddish”**

UNESCO 12 November 2012

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to this symposium on the
Permanence of Yiddish.

I wish to congratulate B'nai B'rith and *la Maison de la Culture
yiddish-Bibliothèque Medem* in Paris for this initiative.

Languages have a special place in UNESCO's mandate.

More than a means of communication, each language is a
wellspring for identity and the means by which we relate to our
environment.

They are sources of both continuity and innovation – essential for
expression, for education and participation in cultural life, for all
scientific progress.

These ideas guide all our work to protect languages as components of cultural diversity, and this is why I am pleased this symposium is held under the patronage of UNESCO.

Originating in the Ashkenazi culture of the 10th century, Yiddish stands at the heart of Judaism's unique social and cultural identity and history in Europe.

Its survival was threatened by the Holocaust, and Yiddish is listed today on UNESCO's *Atlas of Endangered Languages*.

But the vibrancy of this language can never be in doubt.

This includes the millions of women and men who consider themselves heirs of Yiddish culture and language, even if they do not speak it.

Yiddish remains a language that is being taught and learnt, a language of everyday – thanks to writers, whose numbers are growing, thanks also to a dynamic music scene.

The digital era is amplifying the reach of contemporary Yiddish cultural expressions and renewing ties between communities across the world.

In this spirit, allow me to cite the lines of a poem from the Warsaw ghetto, written in Yiddish by Katsenelson:

For not lost is the hope of a tree,

even when already cut and felled

it grows again

and blooms

without an end—

This is positive -- but we must remain vigilant, because languages are fragile.

UNESCO will continue to support linguistic diversity and Yiddish as part of humanity's cultural diversity.

Let me congratulate once again the organizers of this timely initiative -- B'nai B'rith has been a strong partner with UNESCO since 1966, and this event reaffirms our partnership.

I thank you all for your engagement.

*Ikh wunsch a lang leben der yiddischer shprakh un der yissischer kultur!*ⁱ

Irina Bokova

ⁱ I wish a long life to the Yiddish language and the Yiddish culture