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**LITERACY ‘A PREREQUISITE FOR PEACE’, SECRETARY-
GENERAL SAYS IN MESSAGE FOR ANNUAL DAY**

Following is the message by Secretary-General Kofi Annan for International Literacy Day, 8 September:

International Literacy Day is an annual reminder of a fundamental inequality in our globalizing world: almost one in every seven people are illiterate. This tragic injustice is compounded by a second one: out of a total of 880 million illiterate adults, more than 500 million are women.

This state of affairs is unacceptable. It is an affront to individual human dignity, and damaging to the future well-being of humankind.

Literacy is essential to the development and health of individuals, communities and countries. It is a condition for people's effective participation in the democratic process. It is the basis for the written communication and literature that have long provided the main channel for cross-cultural awareness and understanding. And, at the same time, it is the most precious way we have of expressing, preserving and developing our cultural diversity and identity. Literacy, in short, is a prerequisite for peace.

The literacy gap is in many ways among the most unjust of all, for it has an impact on our ability to bridge all other inequalities -- between men and women; between rich and poor; between the haves and have-nots of the information technology age; between those who stand to gain from globalization and those who are excluded from its benefits.

The right of all girls and boys to quality basic education, where a foundation of adequate literacy skills can be laid, is at the heart of the Education for All movement that unites so many parts of the United Nations family. Next year, we will launch the United Nations Literacy Decade -- an initiative agreed by all countries to energize our work towards reaching the internationally agreed goal of increasing literacy levels by 50 per cent by the year 2015.

Achieving universal literacy is everybody's concern: therefore, it must engage the wider international community, the United Nations family, civil society, the private sector, local groups and individuals. On this International Literacy Day, let us rededicate ourselves to playing our full part in that mission.