

**Welcome Greetings by Ms Chafica Haddad,
Chair of the Intergovernmental Council
for the UNESCO Information for All Programme**



**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

On behalf of the 26 Member States elected to the Council of UNESCO's Intergovernmental Information for All Programme (IFAP) and its subsidiary bodies, in my capacity as Chair of the IFAP Council, and on my own behalf, I would like to extend warm wishes to the organizers and participants in the international conference, "Media and Information Literacy for Building Culture of Open Government".

Nowadays, information and knowledge are the key sources of value addition today across all sectors and are increasingly a source of competitive and strategic advantage. Unless we have equitable access to relevant information and knowledge and unless they are effectively used, national and planetary-scale challenges such as addressing climate change and realizing the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals cannot be achieved. Clearly, information and knowledge are essential for effective decision-making and problem solving from the individual to societal level. Information and knowledge therefore represent powerful catalysts for mobilization and transformation.

Governments through their various departments and functions – education, scientific research, health services, economic and cultural industries, amongst others – have a central role in the provision of access to the public domain for all citizens.

Increasingly through open government and open data initiatives around the globe, we governments are adopting commitments at the policy level to making government information publicly accessible and also putting in place the necessary resources, using both offline and on-line platforms, including social media, to facilitate our citizens' access to the public domain.

The results of these efforts include more rapid innovation and the development of both for-profit and non-profit organizations who are now using this under-utilized public resource to create jobs, new services and benefits in sectors from transport to health. This mind shift is also supporting citizen engagement in government and enhanced transparency.

IFAP has been also contributing to the development and access to the public domain. In the Andean region of Latin America IFAP has worked with local governments to support their efforts to reach out to citizens by making information about the services that citizens were entitled to readily available on-line. This involved changing the mindsets of civil servants and government officials from one of hoarding to sharing public information. In addition, by supporting citizens to develop MIL skills and working with telecom service providers to establish Internet access points, citizens were empowered to engage with local government and exercise their rights and responsibilities.

Also in Latin America, IFAP's establishment of the Bibliotheca Virtual, a repository of the youth policies of 14 countries Latin American countries, has led to increased cooperation between governments as well as youth groups. Simply making these public resources accessible has led to policy innovations with countries learning from each other and benefitting from the experiences of their regional neighbours.

At the normative level through instruments such as the IFAP Code of Ethics for the Information Society and the Moscow Declaration on Media and Information Literacy for Knowledge Societies IFAP has been consistently bringing attention to the need for policies in these critical areas. The Internet universality principles adopted at UNESCO's 38th General Conference are also an endorsement of the importance of MIL and multi-stakeholder partnerships between governmental and various non-governmental actors.

Your conference marks another important stage in IFAP's journey to ensure that every person is able to access and utilize information and knowledge to reach their full potential and contribute to human development and peace. For, when knowledge is power, a mind is a terrible thing to waste. Against the backdrop of the sustainable development goals and the growing recognition that information and knowledge are the key sources of value addition, the reflections of this conference take on heightened importance and are a significant contribution to the global public policy debate.

I should like to express my sincere appreciation to the Government of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug – Ugra (Russian Federation), the Russian National Committee for the UNESCO Information for All Programme, the Interregional Library Cooperation Centre (Russian Federation), the Federal Agency for Print and Mass Communications and UNESCO for making this event possible.

Through committed, consistent efforts that ensure equitable access to information and knowledge, by creating the enabling policy, human capacity and infrastructure to access the public domain humanity can overcome key challenges and reap the collective benefits of a shared heritage and scientific progress in all its forms.

I wish all success in the organization and holding of this important international conference.