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***Memory of the World* includes Australian Indigenous languages**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages have been given world heritage significance today, with the United Nations this week inscribing the Australian Indigenous Languages Collection to Australia's *Memory of the World* Register.

Held in the Library of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra, the Australian Indigenous Languages Collection (AIRC) brings together over 3700 published items written in 102 of the over 250 Australian Indigenous languages, and is the only one of its kind housed in one location and catalogued as one collection.

"Before the European colonisation of Australia there were over 250 languages and 500 dialects spoken by Indigenous people. Of these languages, only 145 are still spoken," AIATSIS Principal Russell Taylor said.

"Australian Indigenous languages are spoken nowhere else in the world, so their loss is not only a loss for Australia, but for the world. The AIRC plays a vital role in preserving these languages, and helping Indigenous groups to revive them. It is of considerable community significance for Australia's Indigenous people," he said.

The collection covers languages from all parts of Australia: from Tasmania to the Torres Strait and from the Kimberley to the southern parts of Australia, and is a storehouse of cultural knowledge and tradition for Indigenous Australians.

The collection provides examples of the types of materials produced in Indigenous languages, including early works such as children's readers and Bible translations, dictionaries, grammars, vocabularies and language learning kits produced by Indigenous Language Centres, and works of the imagination. It provides an historical overview of languages that have been recorded for teaching and learning purposes.

Some of the items in the collection are of aesthetic significance, particularly children's readers illustrated by celebrated Indigenous artists such as Mawalan Marika, Djoki Yunupingu, both from Arnhem Land; and Dennis Nona and Alick Tipoti from the Torres Strait.

UNESCO's Australian *Memory of the World* Program aims to guard against collective amnesia by preserving and enabling access to valuable archival and library collections world-wide. The inscription was announced at a ceremony at the State Library of Queensland on Wednesday.

"The AIATSIS Library aims to develop, maintain and preserve well-documented collections and to provide the best possible access to clients, both in person and remotely via the Internet," Mr Taylor said.

For more information on the AIATSIS Library, visit <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/collections/library.html> or for information on the AIRC inscription, visit http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-URL_ID=1538&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

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