

Message from ELRA CEO and ELDA managing director

Co-chair of the organizing committee

Dr. Khalid Choukri

Dear M. Taib Debbag, representing M. Ahmed Reda Chami, Minister of Trade, Industry and New Technologies,

M. Jochen Richer, representing M. Leonard Orban, the European Commissioner for Multilingualism,

Dear Colleagues, Dear friends

مرحبا بكم جميعا في مراكش - مرحبكم كلكم فمراكش

Marhaban becom jamias fi Marrakech,

mrahbabicml fmarrakech,

mrahbabikoum ran di Marrakech,

These three very short sentences stated in Modern Standard Arabic, Moroccan colloquial Arabic and Amazigh from the Rif region, north of Morocco, summarize in a simple but exceptional way both the LREC philosophy and the Moroccan attitudes towards language issues, towards multilingualism, multiculturalism, cultural diversity, variety of civilizations and their dialogues, and also new information technologies.

Let me first express my profound gratitude to the King Mohammed VI for honoring our conference with his Royal Patronage. The Royal Patronage highlights the importance his majesty attributes to this field and the encouragements his Majesty has devoted to the different national and international initiatives within our sector. The establishment of a Royal Institute for the Amazigh language (IRCAM), the native language of Morocco, in complement to the strong support to existing institutions like the Institute for Arabization (IERA), shows the Royal Commitment to see the languages reinforce the foundations of inter-cultural comprehensions and diversity in Morocco and beyond.

So in the name of ELRA, LREC Program Committee, and I am sure I can speak on their behalf, let me express to his Majesty our gratitude for his support and read a few sentences of the letter we will send his Majesty after our meeting.

*To His Majesty King Mohammed VI,
His Majesty,*

On behalf of the European Language resources association and the participants to LREC 2008 we would like to express to His Majesty our gratitude for the honor to hold our conference under His Majesty's High Patronage. We would like to express our gratefulness for the examples set up by your majesty in boosting the multilingual nature of the Moroccan society and assure His Majesty of our full support to such royal actions and the commitment of our community to enrich such experience through our own efforts in joint projects that build on His Majesty's Language diversity initiatives.

His Majesty,

Our activities in language technologies as well as in language resources (collection and preservation), and in evaluation of language technologies are key instruments to remove the language, cultural and civilization barriers. These activities are also key instruments to better educated young generations, to give all citizens access to the information society and to the elders a better living conditions through speech and other related ambient technologies.

It is important for our community to inspire from His Majesty's initiatives that stress the dual aspects related to the preservation of our cultural heritage while investing on new technologies and on the training of human resources.

With our deepest respect

Dr. Khalid CHOUKRI, on behalf of the ELRA board and the LREC committees

Dear LREC participants,

We are proud to welcome you in Marrakech, where we are pleased to contribute to the organization of this sixth edition of the Language Resources and Evaluation Conference, LREC 2008. We are very happy to continue the organization of such a major conference for the Human Language Technology community in such a wonderful city.

Let me take this opportunity to thank Mr. A. Reda Chami, Minister of Trade, Industry and New technologies for his support and ask Dr. Taïb Debbagh to convey our best wishes. I would like to thank Mr. Leonard Orban, the European Commissioner for multilingualism, and his representative today Mr. Jochen Richter for his participation. I would like to thank Mr. Ahmed Lakhfir the Moroccan Secretary of State for the Foreign Affairs and Cooperation for his strong support, and Mr. Mounir Chraïbi, Wali of Marrakech, though he can not be with us today, for his continuous support and friendly help. I would like to express particular thanks to his excellence Fathallah Sejilmassi, the Moroccan Ambassador in France and his team (in particular Khalid Afkir) for his strong commitment and dedication.

I would also like to extend our warm thanks to our Moroccan colleagues from the Local Advisory Committee; you may have seen that several ministries, most of the Moroccan universities and institutions are contributing to the success of LREC2008. The list is in our booklet to give you some contacts for potential joint projects and cooperation but let me just quickly name the institutions: the University Al Akhawayn, Ifrane, the University Mohammed V Souissi, Rabat, the University Cadi Ayyad Marrakech, the CNRST (Centre National pour la Recherche Scientifique et Technique), the Royal Institute of the Amazigh Culture, Rabat, the Institut d'Etudes et de Recherches pour l'Arabisation, Rabat, INPT (Institut National des Postes et Télécommunications), Rabat and ENSIAS (École Nationale Supérieure d'Informatique et d'Analyse des Systèmes), Rabat.

I can not forget that this year we celebrate the 10th anniversary of LREC, some of you may remember how things started ten years ago in Granada (LREC 1998) with Antonio Zampolli and Angel Martin-Municio, I would like to say how much we owe them today.

The emergence of the Web has largely contributed to promote the sharing of language resources but also, like everything else around the web, it has made it critical to excavate about the nature and the quality of what one gets on the web and the various implications related to such availability (quality, rights and licensing, re-use and exploitation,...). Let me mention just one issue that will be largely debated in this conference: the legal aspect. A survey of the existing licensing schemes recently conducted by ELDA showed that there are more than ten license models, several of them backed up by large institutions, and which handle similar, or even identical, legal matters. Several of them are derived from the software industry traditions and simply transposed to Language Resources. Such abundance and

proliferation, instead of helping users to better understand their rights, duties, responsibilities, and liabilities, are confusing most of them who are not prepared to invest time and money in legal advises. Other aspects will also be discussed that may have a substantial impact on the next decade of Language Resources and Evaluation. The proliferation of resources will also be of major importance in our field. It is becoming natural to search the web for the latest dictionary, corpus, list of words, broadcast recordings, etc, free of charge and copyright free. One may identify a large number of such items for a given language. In many cases, there are serious doubts about the quality but also about the origin as well as the actual right owners. It is a challenge for Data Centers like ELRA, LDC, GSK, Chinese-LDC, and similar agencies, to ensure that such trend is fully supported and streamlined for the benefits of all.

If you would like to learn more about ELRA and ELDA, the ELRA/ELDA staff is available during the conference. You will also find more information on our web sites, at www.elra.info and www.elda.org.

Suggestions to improve any aspects of the conference are welcome, and if you need any assistance to make of this event a more memorable one, please do not hesitate to contact our staff, who will be very pleased to help.

Let me now give you some practical information about the next few days:

Social events: We are very please to invite you to the welcome reception of tonight, this will take place in a very mysterious place that we will reach after a 20mn ride. Buses will leave the conference center at 20:15 so be on time and make sure you have your invitation with you; May I remind you that evenings in Marrakech are very chilly so dress accordingly.

Next Friday we will be happy to invite you to the ELRA Gala dinner, we always feel happy that after 3 hard days we get a chance to get together and relax in a lovely atmosphere. Again shuttles are planned for all of us and we will be leaving the conference center around 20:15.

SECURITY: Please keep your badge visible; I am sure you understand the security issues behind that with more than 1000 attendees.

For Lunch: nothing is organized but I am sure you will enjoy some of the close-by restaurant (there are many in the avenue Med VI just in front of the center but may take sometime), there is also lunch boxes that you can buy from the travel agent as well as tickets for the Mansour Hotel buffet.

WIFI: LREC2008. Please make sure that you do not use all the bandwidth and share it with colleagues.

For any assistance please contact our staff that you can recognise with the RED lanyards they wear.

We have appointed a travel agent to handle the extra conference aspects so please talk to them to make your stay in Marrakech more enjoyable.

I can not finish this official statement without a very personal thought to one of my team members Victoria Arranz. I am sure that most of you have been in touch with Victoria during the last LREC and during the last weeks and months. I am sorry to say that Victoria had to leave urgently for family reason and would like to convey our warm friendship.

Once again, welcome to Marrakech, welcome to LREC 2008.

Khalid Choukri
ELRA CEO and ELDA Managing Director