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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of International Day for the Elimination
of Racial Discrimination**

21 March 2008

Every year, on 21 March, we observe International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. This Day was established in 1966, in the wake of the Sharpsville massacre in South Africa. While many things have changed over the past forty years, and much progress has been made, racism and discrimination remain major problems for today's world, undermining global efforts for peace, justice and development. Millions of men and women still suffer – and even die – because of their colour, ethnicity, religion or social status. Today is a call for action to put an end to this intolerable situation.

Our work this year carries particular significance, as it coincides with the 60th anniversary celebrations of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The United Nations has chosen as its motto for this occasion “dignity and justice for all of us”. This is intended as a powerful reminder that human rights and fundamental freedoms belong to everyone, without distinction of any kind.

Let us use this joint anniversary to redouble our efforts to eliminate racial discrimination, in all its forms. Let us work together to stop the racial violence that destroys the lives of so many individuals and communities, often the poorest and most vulnerable. Above all, let us eliminate the ignorance and prejudice that lies behind this violence and oppression.

Quality education is vital in this regard. UNESCO has constantly advocated the importance of education for combating stereotypes and building mutual understanding and respect. High quality learning materials and pedagogical

approaches that promote social cohesion and respect for human rights are among the most powerful weapons in the fight against discrimination. Sport and physical education must also provide an effective framework for promoting dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding, in particular among youth.

But changing attitudes and behaviour also demands new and audacious strategies, which engage the participation of all actors of society. To this end, UNESCO has launched a large-scale project to create an International Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination, aimed at bringing public and private partners together around concrete social problems.

Today, let us pledge to intensify these efforts to eliminate racial discrimination, and to realize the right of every individual to live in dignity and peace.

Koïchiro Matsuura