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**Message from Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of World Water Day**

“Clean Water for a Healthy World”

22 March 2010

Water is fundamental to life on earth. For human populations and ecosystems to thrive, that water must be clean, it must stay clean and, most importantly, it must be accessible to all.

World Water Day 2010 calls for “Clean Water for a Healthy World”. As we celebrate this Day, let us consider the facts. More than 2.5 billion people live without proper sanitation. An estimated 884 million people, the majority of them in Africa, do not have access to safe drinking water. Some 1.5 million children under five die each year from sickness caused by water-borne diseases. The degradation of water quality in rivers, streams, lakes, and groundwater systems has a direct impact on ecosystems and human health. This state of affairs represents an unspeakable human tragedy, and is also major obstacle to development.

Water-related sickness and the additional financial hardship it brings, lowers the odds that a poor family will educate its children. This, in turn, robs the next generation of the opportunity to improve their own circumstances and break the cycle of poverty and deprivation trapping them. Clean water and proper sanitation are where it all starts. A key approach to addressing water quality challenges should be based on pollution prevention, control and restoration strategies.

Numerous rivers, once the source of human prosperity and rich wildlife, are now heavily polluted. The degradation of water quality in surface and groundwater systems is further exacerbating water scarcity and negatively impacting our natural

environment and the ecosystem services and goods that it provides, jeopardizing food security and livelihoods.

In these cost-cutting times, when economic difficulties jeopardise investment in development, let us be clear that developmental progress more than pays for itself. It has been estimated that achieving the Millennium Development Goals for access to safe water and sanitation would produce a global saving of more than \$84 billion. We already have the scientific knowledge to make immediate strides in the provision of clean water and sanitation, provided the funding is there. Researchers are developing new and ingenious ways of protecting surface waters and groundwater systems from pollution, and ensuring better water management.

As the lead UN agency for water sciences and education, UNESCO is moving ahead with an array of programmes to further this know-how. UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme is actively engaged in fostering science and knowledge for protecting the quality of surface waters and groundwater systems. Likewise, UNESCO is an active contributor to the monitoring of the state of the world's freshwater resources in the World Water Development Report coordinated by the World Water Assessment Programme, whose secretariat is hosted and led by UNESCO. Since 2003, UNESCO has overseen the training of dozens of water scientists and engineers from developing countries at the Netherlands based UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education, a world-ranking establishment. UNESCO promotes capacity building for better management of water resources through its water centres and chairs operating under the auspices of UNESCO in many parts of the world.

Much remains to be done if we are to make a difference to the lives of millions of people. On this World Water Day, I urge Governments, civil society, the private sector and all stakeholders to put the goal of "Clean Water for a Healthy World" at the forefront of their priorities.

Irina Bokova