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**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the International Day
for the Remembrance of the
Slave Trade and its Abolition**

23 August 2010

In this International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, remembrance of the slave trade and slavery, one of the worst tragedies in the history of humanity, prompts us to reflect on possible ways of alleviating and overcoming such painful memories.

Since its establishment in 1998, the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition has afforded us the opportunity every year to pay tribute to the struggle led by the slaves themselves to recover their dignity and freedom. The uprising that took place on the island of Santo Domingo in the night of 22 to 23 August 1791 led to Haiti's independence – the first victory of slaves over their oppressors. This revolution had worldwide repercussions and a considerable impact on liberation struggles in the Latin American and Caribbean countries, some of which are celebrating the bicentenary of their independence this year.

The Slave Route Project has provided UNESCO with significant experience and expertise, enabling the Organization to contribute substantially to this critical reflection on the ways and means of securing the reconciliation and rapprochement of peoples through the shared legacy of the tragedy.

On the basis of the new strategy defined for the Project, UNESCO will continue to implement innovative intersectoral activities and information and awareness-raising campaigns to disseminate and ensure recognition of historical facts and of the substantial cultural interaction arising from the slave trade and slavery.

In order to ensure the vitality and sustainability of the project, new themes are accordingly being addressed with a view to studying this issue in greater depth: (i) African presence in the world; (ii) the psychological consequences of the slave trade and slavery; (iii) the transfer of knowledge and skills from Africa to the rest of the world; (iv) tourism for remembrance; and (v) cultural and creative industries arising from the tragedy.

The Slave Route Project is a highly ambitious initiative with its sights set resolutely on the future, to the extent that it contributes in the long term to enhancing mutual understanding and intercultural dialogue. The challenge of “living together” in our multicultural societies implies recognition of each person's history and memory, and at the same time the sharing of a common heritage, in order to transcend past tragedies.

On the occasion of this International Day, I invite all UNESCO's partners, including national authorities, international and non-governmental organizations and civil society, to provide opportunities for exchange and reflection that place emphasis on the beneficial effects of cultural diversity, recognizing the importance of the continuous transfers and exchanges among cultures and the links established since time immemorial.

Irina Bokova