



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

## Message from

**Ms Irina Bokova,  
Director-General of UNESCO,**

**on the occasion of Human Rights Day**

**UNESCO, 10 December 2012**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted on 10 December 1948, expresses the values and fundamental freedoms that lie at the heart of a united humanity. The Declaration is one of the most humanistic and inspiring texts ever written – it is also a call to action, for people and governments to join forces to raise awareness about and enforce human rights and to ensure that they are exercised in full.

At a time of uncertainty and change, we are duty-bound to observe the principles of human dignity and fundamental freedoms – there can be no justification for breaching them. Human Rights Day gives us an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to these values and our resolve to put them into practice across the world for all to enjoy.

As long as people are prevented from asserting their basic rights, the humanist struggle for human dignity must continue. We must ensure silenced voices are heard – silenced because they are marginalized, subjected to discrimination, live in poverty, do not know or cannot exercise their rights. New technology and social media provide a new generation with new resources for dialogue, participation and mobilization, whose potential we must unlock. Giving voice to the voiceless means providing them with formal and genuine means of making themselves heard through quality education for all, access to culture, the free flow of ideas in the democratic dialogue – this is what UNESCO works to achieve.

There is a wide gap between the solemn proclamation of rights and their actual exercise by billions of people in their daily lives. However, in recent history, rapid progress has been achieved by activists worldwide, who have peacefully claimed dignity, equality and justice, despite being often subjected to violence and repression.

Let us draw inspiration from their actions to strengthen respect for human rights. This holds the key to more inclusive and stronger societies, to living in peace and to strengthening our work to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

On 10 December 2012, UNESCO will award the UNESCO/Bilbao Prize for the Promotion of a Culture of Human Rights to the Most Reverend Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus, a great humanist who has spoken loud and clear for all those who could not be heard. "We would not know how to think, or walk, or speak, or behave as human beings unless we learned it from other human beings. We need other human beings in order to be human." His words must guide us in our efforts to build a universal culture of human rights, in which each human voice matters and makes a difference.

Irina Bokova