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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the *International Day for the Elimination of Racial
Discrimination***

21 March 2014

The *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* is an opportunity for women and men, along with the whole United Nations System, to renew their commitment to building a world of justice, equality and dignity, where racial discrimination has no place.

Racial discrimination violates the inherent rights and dignity of women and men. It holds back entire societies from lasting peace, and it sets obstacles before inclusive, sustainable development. Bigotry impoverishes the world, seeking to divide humanity against itself and undermine the inexhaustible strength that lies in our diversity. Equality and justice must guide us, no matter the circumstances. At this time of deep social transformation and global change, we can draw strength from the experience of the late Nelson Mandela and his determination to bridge divides despite all challenges.

On this day, we must recall that respect of others is essential to respect for ourselves and our own communities and that humanity is a single family, brought together by shared aspirations and a common destiny. Lasting peace can only be built on the equality and dignity of every woman and man -- regardless of ethnic, religious, gender, socioeconomic or other background.

This cannot be taken for granted. There has been tremendous progress in making real the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – but racial discrimination and hatred, including hate-motivated actions and crimes, remain far too prevalent

across the world. These threats are compounded by deepening inequalities, and rising exclusion and marginalisation, which weaken the fabric of societies.

Respect and tolerance are liberating acts, whereby the differences of others are recognized as the same as our own and whereby the riches of another culture are taken as the wealth of all.

This needs to be taught, because education remains the most powerful way to prevent racism and uproot discrimination. This is why UNESCO is advancing human rights education across the world, and developing new forms of education for global citizenship. In the classroom and outside, we need to start early, in teaching the values of respect, tolerance and solidarity -- by promoting sports and youth engagement, by safeguarding the common history of humanity, including the history of slavery and places of memory, and by fostering new alliances to challenge discrimination wherever it takes root.

UNESCO is acting all of these levels, through the Slave Route Project, through the safeguarding of cultural heritage of universal significance, as well as through such initiatives as the *International Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination*.

The fight against discrimination is one we must all lead, everyday, through our own actions – but, together, we can multiply our efforts to build a more just, equal world of dignity for all women and men. This is UNESCO's message on the 2014 *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*.

Irina Bokova