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

**on the occasion of International Day for the Remembrance
of the Slave Trade and its Abolition**

23 August 2015

International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition is both a tribute to every victim and their resistance against slavery and a call for truth, justice and dialogue between peoples. The history of the slave trade is that of a battle, and eventually a victory, for freedom and human rights, symbolized by the uprising of the slaves of Santo Domingo on the night of 22 to 23 August 1791. This year, such a message is particularly important, because 2015 marks the beginning of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024).

The spirit of this Day, established in 1997 on the initiative of UNESCO, dovetails with the Decade's goal to promote knowledge of and respect for the contribution of people of African descent to cultural diversity and the development of societies. The crime of slavery has forged irreversible bonds between peoples and continents, and reminds all peoples of the world that their destinies are linked, because their histories and identities were partly made across the seas, sometimes even on other continents. By teaching, communicating and transmitting this history, we can now reinforce the rights and the dignity of people of African descent and, together, fight against all forms of racism and discrimination.

Through its Slave Route Project and *General History of Africa*, UNESCO is striving to reveal the reality of slavery and the slave trade to help us to learn from this chapter of history. For 20 years, the Slave Route Project has stimulated research and encouraged the implementation of educational tools in schools, the protection of memorial sites and even the official recognition of slavery as a crime against humanity by the United Nations in 2001. UNESCO's commitment is also embodied

in its organization of the international competition for the design of the Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, inaugurated this year at United Nations Headquarters.

Faced with the permanent dangers of racism and extremism, UNESCO is taking action to ensure that memory and history be forces for dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding. By promoting the diversity inherent in nations, through the experience of slavery and the slave trade, we can better understand the world's diversity and find the road to peace.

Irina Bokova