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**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,**

**Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of International Migrants Day**

**18 December 2016**

The deteriorating conditions surrounding the movement of migrants and refugees across the world today, and the alarming increase in the related death toll, call for new action to strengthen global solidarity and the protection of their human rights.

This was the message sent by the *World Humanitarian Summit* and the *United Nations Summit for Refugees and Migrants*, and its New York Declaration.

Now, the world must act.

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* provides a new comprehensive framework for moving forward, charting a new global migration agenda grounded on the principles of human rights, gender equality and respect for cultural diversity.

UNESCO is working with Member States, other United System agencies and stakeholders, to translate this commitment into reality, investing in the development of sharper policies, stronger cooperation, wider knowledge-sharing. A common thread of all of our initiatives is the promotion of a welcoming culture that will enable the full inclusion and participation of refugees and migrants in receiving societies.

The role of cities is decisive here, to craft new ways of living together. This is the spirit underpinning the *Welcoming Cities for Refugees Initiative* launched with the *Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation* and the *European Coalition of Cities against Racism*, part of UNESCO's *International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities - ICCAR*, launched in 2004. We are leading ground-breaking initiatives to empower journalists to counter xenophobic and stereotypical narratives in the media. Through

global citizenship education, we are acting to foster a sense of solidarity with others, sharing the wealth of diversity as a force of renewal. Where needs are most acute, in the Syria crisis, UNESCO is providing quality education, psycho-social support and skills for a better life to refugees and internally displaced persons. Leveraging our standard-setting instruments on the recognition of foreign qualifications and on technical and vocational education and training, we are addressing the barriers to allow the access of migrants and refugees to education and to the labour market.

Protecting the human rights and dignity of migrants and refugees is a humanitarian emergency and a development imperative -- it is also a condition for building a more just, peaceful and sustainable world.

On this *International Migrants Day*, I call on Member States to renew the promise of 2030 Agenda to leave no one behind.

Irina Bokova