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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of International Francophonie Day

20 March 2017

On the occasion of International Francophonie Day, UNESCO expresses its deep commitment to promoting linguistic and cultural diversity as a principle inherent to human dignity and as a leading force for dialogue and peace.

The French language brings together continents and communities of different origins, cultures and beliefs. It promotes relationships of solidarity and mutual assistance – it opens new opportunities for development and the fight against poverty – and it drives innovation and creativity. It is also the foundation of a common sense of belonging between more than 274 million speakers worldwide, able to express their thoughts without using borrowed words.

The French language crystallizes centuries of culture and history. It also carries universal values of dignity and freedom. It is in French that Pascal, Voltaire or Rousseau led the fight for tolerance, democracy and human rights. It was in French that Assia Djebar defended the rights of women and that Césaire, Senghor and so many others laid the foundations of modern humanist consciousness. On all 5 continents, hundreds of millions of men and women express their hopes for a better life in French. Apollinaire, Kundera and Beckett wrote some of their strongest works in French, and it was also in this beautiful language that Marie Curie wrote her thesis on uranium, which revolutionized modern science.

Together with the International Organization of la Francophonie, UNESCO reaffirms today its commitment to promote the immense potential of the French language as a force for peace and for the full realization of the Sustainable Development Goals for

all. The French language is an asset in our pursuit of cultural diversity and human dignity. Let us celebrate its beauty and energy!

Irina Bokova