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Message from Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO,

on the occasion of

International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

21 March 2017

Racial discrimination is a poison that diminishes individuals and societies, perpetuates inequality and feeds anger, bitterness and violence. The fight against racism and all forms of discrimination is a mainstay of peace and social cohesion, especially in our increasingly diverse societies. On the occasion of International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, UNESCO calls on all its Member States and partners to step up their efforts to build a more inclusive, more giving and fairer world.

One of the strongest bastions against racial discrimination is formed by education, awareness of the inanity of racial pseudo-theories, and knowledge of crimes committed in the name of such prejudices throughout history. In this spirit, UNESCO works with teachers, museums and publishers to try to combat stereotypes that stigmatize individuals and peoples because of the colour of their skin, their origin or their affiliation. For it is not enough to acknowledge the damaging effects of racism – we also need the tools and instincts to fight it and condemn it wherever it occurs, in whatever form, from petty, everyday humiliation to aggravated violence. This fight starts in the mind of each of us, and must be conveyed in every way possible. For instance, UNESCO and the Musée de l'Homme are organizing an exhibition to be held in Paris from March on the theme of "Us and Them – From Prejudice to Racism". Together with the mayors and other urban stakeholders in the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR), UNESCO is committed to developing policies in favour of urban inclusion, non-discrimination and diversity. In partnership with the Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation and the European Coalition of Cities against Racism, UNESCO has in particular launched the initiative "Welcoming cities

for refugees” with a view to supporting local authorities in their reception policies. Sport is also a powerful lever for inclusion and that is why UNESCO is waging a campaign with Juventus FC, Radio PRISA and the Santillana Foundation to combat racism in football, through the campaigns “#what colour?” “Sin respeto no hay juego” and “#Together4InclusiveSport” with the Tolerance Center in Moscow.

At a time of economic crisis and social uncertainty, “the other” is always a convenient scapegoat, and racial discrimination a dangerous temptation that manufacturers of hatred know all too well how to exploit. Faced with the increase in acts and the growing acceptance of statements that encourage racism and hatred of others, UNESCO calls for citizens to react, to pass on the values of solidarity, empathy and altruism. In a world of diversity, understanding and respect of others constitute the only possible path. Building walls to keep other people out often means keeping ourselves shut in. Our diversity is a strength: let us learn how to draw on it for the resources of inventiveness, creativity and peace. The more we respect others, the more we respect ourselves.

Irina Bokova