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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the International Day of Nowruz

21 March 2017

For over 3,000 years, millions of people across the world have been celebrating the arrival of spring every year. From western, central and southern Asia to the Caucasus, the Balkans and other regions, peoples of different cultures, religions and languages have come together to share the values of Nowruz.

Through dance, poems, songs, meals and other social practices, the celebration of Nowruz is a moment for men and women, boys and girls, to pay their respect to nature and wish for a better future. Since 2009, Nowruz has been inscribed on the *UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* as a festivity of rich diversity promoting peace and solidarity across regions and generations.

The famous poet, Rumi, once wrote: "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing, there is a field. I will meet you there." Nowruz is a field where reconciliation and dialogue can take their roots. It is a field where traditions and rituals are passed from generation to generation, to share moments of togetherness, tolerance, harmony and joy.

At a time when violent extremism seeks to destroy diversity and freedoms, Nowruz is a reminder of the power of culture and heritage to build resilient and sustainable societies. It is a source of confidence and belonging for all. This message resonates strongly around the world today at a time when Governments are redoubling efforts to take forward the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Paris Climate Agreement*.

On this occasion, let us all embrace the values of Nowruz and be inspired by its universal message of peace and solidarity.

Happy New Year to all!

Irina Bokova