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**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of the World Water Day**

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Most human activities produce wastewater and over 80 percent of the world's wastewater is released to the environment without treatment. This cannot go on – this is the message of the 2017 *United Nations World Water Development Report*. Limiting the discharge of untreated wastewater into nature not only saves lives and strengthens healthy ecosystems – it can help advance sustainable growth.

Access to safe water and sanitation services is essential to the human rights and dignity, and the survival, of women and men across the world, especially the most disadvantaged. This is vital for progress across the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* – water links all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their interconnected targets.

In the face of growing demand, wastewater can be a reliable alternative source of water – this calls for shifting the paradigm of wastewater management from 'treatment and disposal' to 'reduce, reuse, recycle and resource recovery'. Wastewater should no longer be seen as a problem, but as part of the solution to challenges that all societies are facing. Treated wastewater can be a cost-efficient, sustainable, safe and reliable alternative source of water for a variety of purposes – from irrigation and industrial uses to drinking water, particularly under conditions of water scarcity. For this, we need to change mind-sets, to raise awareness and redouble educational efforts to share the benefits of wastewater reuse.

We need to see improved wastewater management at the heart of a circular economy, balancing development with the protection and sustainable use of natural

resources. The benefits are wide-ranging, with implications on food and energy security and in mitigating the impacts of climate change.

As the United Nations agency for water sciences and education, UNESCO is working across the board to these ends, starting with the International Hydrological Programme and its network of National Committees, Centres and Chairs. Our World Water Assessment Programme provides Governments and the international community with cutting-edge and policy-relevant information on freshwater resources worldwide, pioneering also new techniques in gender-sensitive water monitoring. All of this is vital for the success of the 2030 Agenda.

At a time when demand is growing and limited resources are increasingly stressed by over-abstraction, pollution and climate change, we simply must not neglect the opportunities from improved wastewater management. We cannot afford to waste wastewater – this is UNESCO's message today.

Irina Bokova