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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the International Day for the Conservation of the
Mangrove Ecosystem**

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Coastal mangroves are among the most threatened ecosystems on earth. Current estimates indicate that up to 67% of mangroves have been lost to date, and nearly all unprotected mangroves could perish over the next 100 years.

The stakes are high, because mangrove ecosystems provide benefits and services that are essential for life. From advancing food security, sustaining fisheries and forest products and offering protection from storms, tsunamis and sea level rise to preventing shoreline erosion, regulating coastal water quality and providing habitats for endangered marine species -- the list is long on the importance of mangrove ecosystems. This includes the unique role that they play in sequestering and storing significant amounts of coastal blue carbon from the atmosphere and ocean, crucial for mitigating climate change.

UNESCO is drawing on all of its strengths -- through its Man and the Biosphere Programme, its International Hydrological Programme, its Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission and the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems Programme -- to protect mangrove ecosystems. This action reaches across the world, from the Bosque de Paz transboundary biosphere reserve in Ecuador and Peru, and the Delta de Saloum Biosphere Reserve in Senegal to the Langkawi UNESCO Global Geopark in Malaysia. UNESCO is engaged deeply in supporting the conservation of mangroves, while advancing the sustainable development of local communities who interact closely with them and depend on their goods and services. UNESCO is also leading an active role in the *Blue Carbon Initiative* to mitigate climate change through the conservation, protection, restoration and sustainable use of

coastal and marine ecosystems, focusing on mangroves, tidal marshes and seagrasses.

We must do far more, and this calls for stronger science. To this end, UNESCO is working to broaden the capacities of States and reinforce their scientific knowledge, especially in countries that are highly dependent on these ecosystems in Africa and Small Islands Development States, always working with local communities, always drawing on indigenous knowledge.

This *International Day for the Conservation of the Mangrove Ecosystem* is the moment for everyone to redouble their commitment to the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Paris Climate Agreement*. UNESCO's message today is clear -- we must reverse the trend of degradation and protect the mangroves that are so essential to the health of the planet.

Irina Bokova