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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the International Day of Democracy

15 September 2017

UNESCO was created in 1945 on a clear idea.

In the words of our Constitution:

“The great and terrible war which has now ended was a war made possible by the denial of the democratic principles of the dignity, equality and mutual respect of men, and by the propagation, in their place, through ignorance and prejudice, of the doctrine of the inequality of men and races.”

In new times, in another century, this idea still rings true.

Change is racing across the world, transforming societies everywhere. This is opening vast new opportunities for women and men to realise their human rights, to become empowered citizens and fulfil their aspirations to decent jobs, to participate fully in society, to advance dialogue and bolster the foundations for peace.

With this come steep new challenges also. The challenges of enduring poverty and deepening inequalities. The challenges of conflict and violence, including terrorism and violent extremism. The challenges of rights denied and voices silenced through weak institutions, the rise of populism and exclusive rule.

In this context, democracy is both a map and a compass setting. It is the path and the direction for moving forward.

This message stands at the heart of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Sustainable Development Goal 16 calls on all States to “*promote peaceful and*

inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.”

Development will not be sustainable if it is not inclusive. Peace will not be lasting if it is not just. This is why the 2030 Agenda promises to leave no one behind. Democracy is about effective and accountable institutions, the rule of law and good governance -- it is also a culture, a way of thinking, being and acting, with others, in society. This must be taught and shared, voiced and expressed across all boundary lines, within and between all societies, starting with individual women and men -- especially those most at risk, including refugees and migrants.

Everyone must be represented, especially those most marginalised.

Every voice must be heard, especially those most silenced.

Every action must be accountable to the benefit of all, in the spirit of dialogue and respect.

Building a better future must start with defending the rights and dignity of everyone today. This is UNESCO's message on this *International Day of Democracy*.

Irina Bokova