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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the International Day for Disaster Reduction

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Disasters produced by natural hazards strike societies at the heart and affect millions of people every year worldwide. These past months have been particularly destructive, when all have seen the extent of the threat and of our own vulnerability. Cyclones in the Caribbean and the USA have far exceeded in intensity the typical seasonal levels, and the population of Mexico has been severely hit by earthquakes, to name but a few examples. Human activities are linked to this escalation.

In 2016, 24.2 million persons had to leave their homes because of disasters. Over the last twenty years, more than 1.35 million have died as a result of their vulnerability and exposure to natural hazards, with women and girls bearing a heavy toll. In the last two decades, over 4 billion persons have been displaced and left homeless, injured or in need of emergency assistance. The resulting loss of life is tragic, while the resulting destruction is extremely costly. Disasters lead to an estimated annual economic loss of USD\$ 250 to 300 billion. These figures are likely to increase with the rising pressures of climate change, overpopulation and urbanization.

UNESCO stands in solidarity with all the persons affected by disasters worldwide. This must translate into concrete public policies to take forward implementation of the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction*, the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* and the *Paris Climate Agreement*. UNESCO is acting across the board to advocate for risk awareness, prevention and preparedness. We operate at the interface between the natural and social sciences, education, culture and communication to reduce exposure and displacements through capacity building, knowledge sharing and networking, early warning and policy advice.

“Home Safe Home” is the slogan for this *International Day for Disaster Reduction*. This is an opportunity to mobilize the world and to strengthen collaboration with all stakeholders. We can reduce the risks that stem from rapid urbanisation, poverty, environmental deterioration and climate change. Above all, we need to avoid the creation of risks in the first place. This demands more education, culture, and local knowledge, along with prevention skills.

This is our message -- let us join forces to share it across the world.

Irina Bokova