



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Message from the Director-General of UNESCO,**

**Irina Bokova,**

**on the occasion of the International Day of Tolerance**

**16 November 2015**

Tolerance is a new idea, one which we need now more than ever. It leads us to respect cultural diversity, ways of life and expressions of our own humanity. It is a necessary condition for peace and progress for all people in a diversified and ever-more connected world.

UNESCO was created exactly 70 years ago, on 16 November 1945, the International Day of Tolerance, on the basis that wars could be avoided if people learned to get to know each other better and understood that, in the fertile diversity of their cultures, that which unites them is stronger than that which divides them. These principles were reaffirmed 20 years ago in the *Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*, adopted by UNESCO in 1995. In a globalized world, home to people from many cultures and backgrounds and flooded with pictures of and information about other peoples, tolerance is the cornerstone of sustainable citizenship.

Tolerance is not passive or silent acceptance of differences; it is inseparable from respect for fundamental human rights. It is constant commitment to facilitating exchanges and dialogue, despite difficulties and a lack of understanding which can lead to inward-looking attitudes. It is a call to question prejudice and commonly-held beliefs. When violent extremism spreads messages of hate and intolerance, both on the ground and on social media; when human beings suffer persecution, exclusion or discrimination on the basis of their religion or background; when economic crises accentuate social divides and stand in the way of acceptance of others, such as minorities, foreigners or refugees; we must offer up a different discourse, an open message which calls for tolerance. We must make the lessons of the past more visible and remind people of the extreme situations which can result from rejection of others, racism and anti-Semitism.

Diversity is a reality, calling us to adapt our policies and act appropriately, for which tolerance is key. Today's world presents us with considerable opportunities to better understand each other, share our stories, create a public space on a global scale, enrich our outlook on life and combine our perspectives. It is an invitation for us to strengthen moral and intellectual solidarity between peoples through educational cooperation, dialogue among cultures, knowledge-sharing and free distribution of information. Tolerance is a means of constructing peace; it accelerates innovation and creation, opening our minds to other ways to view the world. This founding mission of UNESCO is not decreed through laws and declarations: it relies on the will and daily efforts of the citizens of the world who are developing this culture of tolerance, and today is the time to support them.

Irina Bokova