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Message from

Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO,

**on the occasion of the International Day
for the Elimination of Violence against Women**

25 November 2014

Violence against women is one of the most common violations of fundamental human rights. In the world today, a woman between 15 and 44 years of age is at a higher risk of being subjected to rape or domestic violence than falling victim to cancer, a car accident, war or malaria. One in three women has been subjected to violence, one girl in three has been married against her will at an early age and some 125 million girls and women have been subjected to female genital excision/mutilation. This is unacceptable.

Violence against women is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses economic, physical, sexual and psychological violence. It occurs in all societies, developed and developing, and in all social classes, and it has devastating consequences on society as a whole. Violence costs lives and it affects women's physical and psychological well-being. It creates a climate of fear and terror that deters women from participating fully in society and it undermines prospects for inclusive and sustainable development.

These acts of violence are not isolated: they feed, all too often, on statements and ideas that endorse or authorize such violence. They are also fuelled by the silence of societies that wish to remain blind to violence occurring daily behind the closed doors of family homes, which weakens the full achievement of children's rights and thus perpetuates such practices.

We do not have the right to remain silent. This year, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, UNESCO also marks the 25th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In partnership with the Association, *Adéquations*, UNESCO is publishing a guide on the impact of violence against

women and on children's rights, and the measures that must be taken to combat it. On this day, we reiterate our determination to understand the fundamental causes of such violence, which are rooted in gender inequality, and to harness the power of education in order to teach mutual respect and human rights as the foundations for more fair, more egalitarian and, therefore, more sustainable societies.

Irina Bokova