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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO**

on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities

"Inclusion Matters: access and empowerment for people of all abilities"

3 December 2015

In 2015, every woman and man, including more than one billion people with some form of disability, will celebrate the *International Day of Persons with Disabilities*.

This International Day is a reminder of the urgent need for new efforts to promote the human rights and dignity of every person with disabilities.

An inclusive society is one that defends the rights and dignity of every citizen, that empowers every woman and man to participate fully in every aspect of social, political, economic and cultural life.

We have seen progress across the world, but persons with disabilities remain one of the most marginalized groups today.

One third of all out-of-school children have disabilities, while fewer than 2 percent of children with disabilities in developing countries are in school. In conflict situations, persons with disabilities often suffer first and most. Their voices are not heard in societies across the world. Only an estimated 5-15 percent of people, who require assistive devices and technologies, have access to them.

Disability cuts across the new *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, and ties together all the Sustainable Development Goals. For its part, UNESCO will continue to work across the board to empower all persons with disabilities. This starts with work to advance inclusive education policies, strategies and programmes. This includes guidance on developing national policies that promote inclusion and

equity, as well as revised policy guidelines on inclusion in education. UNESCO is also acting to harness the power of new technologies for persons with disabilities. The 2014 *UNESCO New Delhi Declaration on Inclusive ICTs for Persons with Disabilities* broke new ground in this respect. UNESCO's work in Open Distance Learning provides further new opportunities to widen inclusion, participation as well as access to information and knowledge. To take this action further forward, Professor Stephen Hawking will be designated as a *UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador*, to encourage women and men across the world in the struggle for equality, respect, rights and dignity.

This is the spirit of the *International Day of Persons with Disabilities* – to celebrate the extraordinary potential of persons with disabilities, to recognize their struggles and triumphs, to push for their full empowerment as equal members of our global society.

In this year when we celebrate the 70th anniversary of UNESCO, this has never been so important.