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**Message from Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of Human Rights Day**

10 December 2010

In a world buffeted by uncertainty, we must remain true to a moral compass. The inherent dignity and rights of every individual must be the starting point for all our action and the measure of its success. The increasing complexity of the world should not take away from this truth. This is the foundation for healthy societies and strong states. It is the basis for a more equitable and stable international order.

Human Rights Day is an opportunity to recall the importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the common standard of achievement for all peoples and states.

The Universal Declaration lies at the heart of a values-based international order that takes its cue from the intrinsic value of every individual, without distinction of any kind. It holds a mirror up to the world, reflecting the progress we have achieved and the obstacles still to be overcome. Human rights are universal, but they are not always universally accepted. Our task is to persuade and nurture all societies and states to move in this direction. Every step forward is a step towards greater individual dignity and towards the common good of all societies. Humanity is never more connected than through our fundamental rights and freedoms.

Human Rights Day is devoted this year to discrimination and the role of human rights defenders in fighting against it. Discrimination trespasses on fundamental rights and freedoms and it violates human dignity. It threatens the fabric of our increasingly fragile societies, fuelling hatred and ignorance. It takes on many shapes, but its face is always that of prejudice.

The promotion of human rights and the fight against discrimination underpins all of UNESCO's activities.

These objectives guide our work to eliminate racial prejudices and stereotypes. They lie at the heart of our action to support quality education for every child and adult, to examine the ethical questions raised by global developments, to harness the power of science for the common good and to defend the freedoms of information and expression.

As leader of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, UNESCO is promoting cultural diversity as a way to build tolerance and overcome discrimination. The dialogue of cultures is the best way to foster understanding and respect between peoples. All cultures are different, but humanity stands as a single community when united around human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Human rights need to be defended every day. On this Human Rights Day, I join the rest of the UN family to pay tribute to the determination of human rights defenders across the world, who, in their courage, speak and act for us all, often at great personal risk. Their voices and actions must be heard and defended as inherent to the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. UNESCO stands alongside them in the fight against discrimination.

Irina Bokova