



United Nations
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pour l'éducation,
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message of the UNESCO Director-General,
Irina Bokova,
on the occasion of the International Women's Day**

8 March 2011

International Women's Day was first honoured one hundred years ago in a handful of European countries. Since then, the celebration has become global, and much has been achieved. The *2011 International Women's Day* is an opportunity to celebrate achievements and mobilize against the challenges that remain.

There is no room for complacency. Less than 40 percent of countries provide girls and boys with equal access to education. Had we reached gender parity in primary education in 2008, there would have been an additional 3.6 million girls in school. Disparities have increased at the secondary level in Africa over the last decade. Only 29 percent of researchers in the world today are women. Two-thirds of the world's 796 million illiterate adults are women.

The impact is serious. Inequality costs lives in terms of child mortality. It blights lives in terms of poverty and marginalization. And it slights lives in terms of opportunities for growth and development.

Gender equality is a red thread weaving through all UNESCO activities to promote international cooperation in education, the sciences, culture, communication and information. We seek to promote basic human rights in order to transform our societies and lay the foundations for equitable and sustainable human development.

This year's International Women's Day is inspired by the theme of '*Equal access to education, training and science and technology: Pathway to decent work for women.*' This goes to the heart of UNESCO's mission. We work to strengthen the bridges between education, training, science and technology and the labour market

in order to promote equal opportunity to decent employment. This starts early, with quality education for all girls and young women from the primary to the tertiary level. It continues with vocational training and education for women who have not acquired basic skills. It proceeds with creating positive role models and career tracks – especially in such areas as science and technology.

These goals guide UNESCO's work in leading the Education for All initiative. They inspire our partnership with L'Oreal to promote women in scientific research. They explain our work in Pakistan to support income generation for women after the floods of 2010 and to increase literacy among women in Afghanistan.

UNESCO is geared up to do much more – to work with official and private sector partners to provide system-wide policy support for governments, to enhance non-formal education and to open learning opportunities for adult women. UNESCO has real leadership in these areas, and we will make the most of this.

Without basic skills, decent work has become a distant dream for too many women. The worlds of science and technology – so important for our lives today – remain beyond the reach of most. Human rights are being violated. Tremendous talents are being lost. This *International Women's Day* is a chance for us all to address these challenges. In times of economic difficulty, there is no better investment.

Irina Bokova