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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 International Day  
for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

**21 March 2015**

Knowledge of history and memory of past crimes can allow us to build a future of peace, providing an antidote to hatred and prejudice. It is in this spirit that International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is dedicated this year to the theme of "Learning from historical tragedies to combat racial discrimination today."

UNESCO has been working tirelessly for many years to disseminate teaching of the history of slavery and the slave trade, recognized as a crime against humanity in 2001. It is essential to deconstruct stereotypes and prejudices that have justified the exploitation of human beings by other human beings and which still persist today, based on ignorance and hatred in various forms of racial discrimination, xenophobia and the rejection of others.

By conducting educational and cultural programmes, such as the Slave Route Project and the *General History of Africa*, and by preserving documentary heritage through the Memory of the World Programme, our conviction is that, while the crimes mobilized several nations, the memory of those crimes can now, in a reverse action, bring countries together and highlight the irreversible connections that have been created between peoples. This message is essential today, to help people to live together in our multicultural societies and this is precisely the message of the International Decade for People of African Descent.

Our first duty is to remember that past tragedies also shed light on the courage and determination of those who have advanced human dignity by fighting against

oppression until slavery was abolished. We are all eternally indebted and this resolve must guide the fight against modern forms of slavery, oppression and discrimination. The initiatives of the International Coalition of Cities against Racism show that significant progress is possible in the fight against racism and discrimination through the adoption of more effective local anti-discrimination policies.

At a time when the United Nations are inaugurating the Permanent Memorial to Honour the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade, transmitting this history remains a compass to guide us towards the future to build peace in the minds of men and women. There is no more powerful driving force for dignity and freedom. This is the meaning of the words of Toussaint Louverture, leader of the victorious slave revolt in Haiti in 1791: "I was born a slave, but nature gave me the soul of a free man."

Irina Bokova