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Message from

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

on the occasion of World Oceans Day

8 June 2013

The oceans constitute a single great body of interconnected seas that covers 71% of the earth's surface. Oceans are the source of life and continue to play a crucial role in the lives of seven billion human beings. Several million people depend directly on the oceans for their food, travel and work. Oceans regulate the climate and provide half of the oxygen that we breathe. Oceans are a resource unlike any other, for they make everything else possible. Their immense biological diversity contributes to the beauty of the world, and we must join forces to preserve it.

With 46 world heritage marine sites, UNESCO supervises a unique world network for the protection and study of oceans. More than one million observation documents and 1,000 new species have been recorded since the first few sites were listed. Oceans are immense but not infinite: over-exploitation of resources, pollution and acidification as a result of global warming tax ecosystems and compromise human well-being. Rising sea levels threaten the lives of millions of people and can lead to redrawing the map of the world. To take full advantage of ocean resources, humanity must invest massively in science and research as soon as possible. This effort must be made collectively, for oceans exceed States' individual capacities – hence the need for better, more inclusive and more tailored governance. In this connection, the Oceans Compact launched in 2012 by Mr Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, on an idea floated by UNESCO, affords an opportunity that must be seized.

In view of the potential that they hold for cooperation and growth, oceans are central to peace and sustainable development in the twenty-first century. In this critical period, UNESCO will redouble efforts to harness scientific cooperation to ocean issues. For more than 50 years, UNESCO's Intergovernmental

Oceanographic Commission (IOC) has been drawing on science in order to understand oceans and improve ocean management. The coordination of the Global Ocean Observing System has led impressive progress in world scientific cooperation. The Ocean Biogeographic Information System (OBIS) is a global platform for sharing information and data on marine biodiversity. As a result of the establishment and coordination of tsunami warning systems, ties of solidarity have been woven among States, and people are less vulnerable to ocean hazards.

Despite the challenges, one point is clear – together, we can protect the oceans. World Oceans Day is an opportunity to recognize this and to undertake to protect the oceans, where life began and on which our future depends.

Irina Bokova