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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of *World Day to Combat Desertification*

"Don't let our future dry up"

17 June 2013

We estimate between 100 to 200 million people live in arid and semi-arid areas with limited freshwater resources. By 2025, two-thirds of them will experience serious water stress – facing pressure from population growth, agricultural production, as well as rising salinity and pollution. The impact of climate change will increase water scarcity, increasing also the frequency of hydrological extremes. The poorest will be hit hardest, as obstacles to sustainable development harden. On this *World Day to Combat Desertification*, we must renew our commitment to supporting inclusive and sustainable solutions to managing water resources in dryland areas.

Water challenges are complex, so solutions must be equally multi-faceted. This calls for innovative thinking and for cooperation across the board, to preserve our ecosystems, to eradicate poverty and to advance social equity, including gender equality.

This is the core message of the *United Nations International Year of Water Cooperation* that UNESCO is leading, to promote deeper cooperation to tackle the rising demand for water access, allocation and services.

The *Water and Development Information for Arid Lands, a Global Network (G-WADI)*, led by UNESCO's International Hydrological Programme, shows our commitment to strengthen global capacity to manage the water resources of dryland areas. This builds on four regional networks in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Arab States, which promote international and regional cooperation in

dryland areas, for stronger management of water resources and mitigation of water-related disasters.

In collaboration with Princeton University, UNESCO is leading an experimental drought monitoring and forecasting system for sub-Saharan Africa, to build capacity through technology and knowledge transfer. Given the impact of drought in Africa, largely dependent on rain-fed agriculture, this is a key step to make the most of water as a source of solidarity.

With the *UN Convention to Combat Desertification*, UNESCO is working in concrete ways to promote sustainable dryland management. This must start on the ground, with the inhabitants of these areas, who often belong to the poorest segments of society. Water is the common denominator of many challenges – in health, in farming and food security and in energy. It can be the common solution also – but this requires commitment from us all, especially for those most affected by water scarcity. This is UNESCO's pledge on *World Day to Combat Desertification*.

Irina Bokova