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联合国教育、
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**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion
of the International Day
for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

21 March 2009

Established by the United Nations in 1966 following the Sharpsville massacre in South Africa, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is an occasion to reaffirm our commitment to the prevention and eradication of racism and racial discrimination. This is both a moral imperative, and a key element in achieving democracy and stability in our multi-ethnic and multicultural societies.

Regrettably, racism continues to afflict the lives of millions of people around the world. All too frequently, we see how racism can manifest itself in extreme violence, causing widespread suffering and death. This is why the fight against racism must remain at the centre of the United Nations and UNESCO agenda.

Eight years ago, in 2001, governments, international organizations and civil society came together in Durban, South Africa, under the auspices of the United Nations, for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. This year, from 20 to 24 April 2009, those same bodies will reconvene in Geneva to evaluate progress towards the goals and promises set out in the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, including the specific recommendations addressed to UNESCO in areas where the Organization has a recognized leadership and expertise.

Catalyzed by the Durban Programme of Action, the 32nd session of the General Conference adopted an Integrated Strategy to Combat Racism, Discrimination, Xenophobia and Intolerance. Since then, UNESCO has worked tirelessly to develop concrete activities aimed at implementing its key objectives, aims and results.

Chief among these is the creation of an International Coalition of Cities against Racism and Discrimination. Since 2004, six Regional Coalitions have been created, each aiming to put into practice at the city level the international conventions, declarations and recommendations on racism and racial discrimination. Under the coordination of a "Lead City", each regional coalition is developing its own « Ten-Point Plan of Action » composed of ten commitments covering education, housing, employment and cultural activities among others, that signatory cities undertake to integrate in their municipal strategies and policies, in partnership with major networks of public and private bodies involved in the fight against discrimination. On 30 June 3 2008, during the 3rd World Forum on Human Rights, held in Nantes, France, all six Regional Coalitions came together as a federated international coalition, thus permitting a truly global exchange of ideas and experiences.

For UNESCO the Durban Review Conference will be an opportunity to share information on other achievements in its fields of competence, including research on slavery and the slave route project, the development of cultural and educational programmes and the preparation of teaching materials and tools against racism, as well as the preservation of cultural diversity and the promotion of dialogue among civilizations. It will also be an opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the right of everyone to live the life of dignity, free of racism and discrimination solemnly promised in the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights whose 60th anniversary we commemorated in 2008. That is why maintaining the momentum of the Durban process and broadening public awareness of UNESCO's work in this field will be at the heart of this year's 21 March reflections.

Like many irrational attitudes, racism is often rooted in fear: fear of the unknown, fear of the different, fear of the other. Fighting it is a responsibility which begins with each and every one of us. On this International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, let us each resolve to practise individually the principles we wish to see respected universally.



Koïchiro Matsuura