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Organización
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联合国教育、
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**Message from Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of Human Rights Day**

10 December 2009

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaims a common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations. Human Rights Day serves as a yearly landmark to remember the victories won in the long struggle to respect the dignity of all human beings. But its main purpose is to mobilize against major threats to human rights, namely poverty, discrimination, gender inequality, climate change and terrorism. “Embrace Diversity. End Discrimination” is the motto of this 61st anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration.

This motto is particularly pertinent in the contemporary world that has become more diverse than ever before. Migration flows at national and international levels are increasing. Continuing economic hardship, armed conflicts and tensions between communities in all parts of the world have pushed thousands to abandon their homelands in search of a better future.

These movements deeply affect all societies. Our major challenge today is to promote harmonious relations among people of different ethnic origin, culture, religion or belief. Ignorance and fear, accentuated by the ongoing economic and financial crisis, is a fertile ground for discrimination and new prejudices to arise. We must not let this happen.

It is only through mutual respect, understanding, constructive dialogue and acceptance of the right to be different that we will diffuse tensions and build more peaceful multicultural societies.

The Durban Review Conference held earlier this year voiced a message of solidarity with all those who remain excluded, marginalized and discriminated. UNESCO is working actively to translate this message into fact because we are committed to the principles of non-discrimination and respect for cultural diversity.

Promoting exchange and dialogue among cultures counts among our top priorities. Dialogue alone will enable us to look beyond our differences and prejudices and to realize that we are united by many common dreams, aspirations and challenges.

Cultural or any other specificity must be aligned with respect for fundamental freedoms. When it comes to the full implementation of human rights, there can be no compromises. Respect for cultural diversity can never justify partial violation of human rights on the grounds of cultural relativism. This is why UNESCO attaches great importance to clarifying the notion of the right to take part in cultural life. It could mark an important step in protecting cultural diversity and lifting possible misconceptions. The other two rights within UNESCO's mandate – the right to education and the right to freedom of opinion and expression – are instrumental to safeguard cultural diversity.

The 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures provides an ideal platform for promoting tolerance, mutual respect and dialogue among cultures. These values are the foundations of a new humanism, a universal vision rooted in a profound respect for human dignity, fundamental rights and the diversity of cultures. This vision compels each and every human being to feel an engaged sense of responsibility towards the other and the safeguarding of our planet.

Indeed, the hopes of the world are turned towards the United Nations Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen. It is our shared responsibility to make concrete commitments towards present and future generations, and to extend full assistance to all those who are directly affected by climate change. UNESCO will be actively engaged in the follow-up to this Summit, through initiatives that encompass education, culture and the sciences, in full respect of human rights.

Let us join forces to reaffirm our determination to make universal human rights a common standard of achievement for all, a reality for everyone.

Irina Bokova