



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

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 Women's Day

"Empower Women, Empower Humanity - Picture it!"

8 March 2015

2015 marks the 20th anniversary of the 4th *World Conference on Women* that culminated in the adoption of the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*. In 1995, States and civil society representatives signed a commitment for gender equality, guided by the conviction that *"women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace."* I was among the 17,000 delegates from across the world, who gathered in Beijing in 1995, and I remember leaving Beijing with hope and a sense of accomplishment.

As we celebrate the anniversary of this historical event, it is clear that, despite significant advances and much hard work, inequalities still exist in countries across the world. 2015 is the year to review achievements and look to the challenges that remain, as well as to untapped potential and opportunities. This is especially important as States shape a new global sustainable development agenda. In moving forward, we must support women's empowerment as a transformational force for human rights, for economic growth, for sustainability – and place gender equality at the heart of all development efforts.

These goals guide all of UNESCO's work to take forward its Global Priority Gender Equality through all of its fields of competence -- to ensure girls' and women's equal access to quality education and skills development, science and technology, information and communication. These objectives underpin UNESCO's *Global Partnership for Girls and Women's Education*, as well as the activities supported by the *Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education*. Our work is one of partnership, across

the United Nations system, working ever more closely with UN Women, as well as with the private sector, reflected in the longstanding *L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science programme*, to support girls and women into scientific careers.

2015 is a decisive year. Twenty years after Beijing, as the world decides on a new agenda, we must craft a new vision that builds on lessons learned and outlines new actions to tackle new and remaining challenges. In this spirit, I call on UNESCO Member States and all partners to join forces to place the transformational power of gender equality at the heart of the post-2015 global sustainable development agenda.

Irina Bokova