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**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of World AIDS Day**

1 December 2015

2015 is the year to identify progress in halting the spread of AIDS and HIV and gaps that still need to be bridged.

Last July, it was announced that the HIV-related targets of Millennium Development Goal 6 — to halt and reverse the spread of HIV and AIDS, and ensure access to antiretroviral therapy for 15 million people -- have not only been achieved but exceeded.

Research shows that if the global community accelerates the response over the next five years, it may be possible to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

This vision is a target of the new Sustainable Development Goal on health, and it will serve as the overarching objective for the global AIDS response for the next 15 years.

This is a tremendous success for human rights and dignity, for societies across the world. At the same time, we must recognize that progress has been uneven, leaving behind especially adolescents and young people. Only 26 percent of girls and 33 percent of boys between the ages of 15 and 19 have a full understanding of how HIV is transmitted and can be prevented. In Africa, AIDS-related illnesses continue to be the leading cause of death among adolescents, and among women of reproductive age.

Investing in the education of young women and men is absolutely essential to HIV prevention and treatment, and to continuing efforts to end all HIV-related stigma

and discrimination. This is why, over the last two decades, UNESCO has worked to overcome discrimination and ensure gender-sensitive and age-appropriate education on sexuality and reproductive health, delivered in safe and healthy learning environments that are free from all forms of gender-based violence.

As UNAIDS cosponsor, UNESCO is fully committed with the new *UNAIDS Strategy 2016-2021*, that places an enhanced emphasis on education and sets out a bold vision for a world where “*young people, regardless of where they live, their sexual orientation or their gender identity, have the knowledge, skills, services, rights and power to protect themselves from HIV.*”

On this *World AIDS Day*, I call on all partners -- Governments, civil society, the private sector, across the United Nations – to join forces. AIDS isn't over, but it can be, if we put adolescents and young people at the centre of our efforts.

Irina Bokova