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**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,  
Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the Nelson Mandela International Day**

**18 July 2016**

We celebrate Nelson Mandela International Day every year to shine light on the legacy of a man who changed the 20th century and helped shape the 21st.

This is a moment for all to renew with the values that inspired Nelson Mandela. Absolute determination. A deep commitment to justice, human rights and fundamental freedoms. A profound belief in the equality and dignity of every woman and man. A relentless engagement for dialogue and solidarity across all lines and divisions.

Nelson Mandela was a great statesman, a fierce advocate for equality, the founding father of peace in South Africa.

The red thread tying all of this together was an untiring, all-encompassing humanism. His was a vision of humanity as one, of women and men united around their essential dignity, brought together by their shared aspirations for a better world.

Today, this message has never been so important for women and men across the world, struggling in societies undergoing deep transformation, and with so many facing the traumas of displacement and poverty. In times of turbulence, Nelson Mandela shows us the power of resisting oppression, of justice over inequality, of dignity over humiliation, of forgiveness over hatred.

As the world takes forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and strives to overcome new sources of adversity, let us recall the lessons of Nelson Mandela's life, and the essential humanism that guided him:

*“For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others.”*

A UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador and 1991 Laureate of the Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, Nelson Mandela's legacy resonates with the mission of UNESCO, to empower all women and men on the basis of their equal rights and dignity, to promote dialogue and solidarity for justice and lasting peace. This action, this spirit has never been so important.

Irina Bokova