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

22 March 2016

Between 1990 and 2010, 2.3 billion people gained access to improved drinking water sources. This is positive, but not enough. More than 700 million people still do not have access to clean and safe water for a healthy life. The 2016 United Nations *World Water Development Report* estimates that some 2 billion people require access to improved sanitation, with girls and women especially disadvantaged. Many developing countries are in water stress hotspots, and likely to be hit hardest by climate change. At the same time, demand for water is soaring, especially in emerging economies where agriculture, industry, and cities are developing at a fast pace.

The stakes are high. Water is fundamental to life. It is vital for more inclusive and sustainable development.

This is why water stands at the heart of the new *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Water is highlighted in Goal 6 on ensuring the availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation, and important for the success of all other objectives – including for advancing the prospect of decent work for all, the focus of the 2016 *World Water Development Report*.

Water is vital for agriculture, industry, transport and the production of energy and is an engine for economic growth. It generates and sustains jobs worldwide, but attaining the development goals will not just be a matter of adequate resources of water as a raw material. Water quality and sanitation remains essential in providing a decent livelihood. Of the 2.3 million work-related deaths every year, 17 percent

can be linked to communicable diseases and unsafe drinking water. This is why safe drinking water and sanitation at the workplace must become priorities everywhere. Meeting the challenge of creating and preserving decent jobs in the face of climate change and water scarcity will require far greater investments in science, technology and innovation. The evidence shows that investing in water infrastructure and services can have high returns for both economic development and job creation. It is important that these investments are planned with all relevant sectors, including agriculture, energy and industry, to ensure they produce the best outcomes for all.

Lead United Nations agency for water sciences and education, UNESCO is working all-out to these ends. This starts with the International Hydrological Programme and its network of National Committees, Centres and Chairs. The UNESCO-IHE Institute for Water Education has trained thousands of water scientists and engineers from developing countries since 2003. Our World Water Assessment Programme provides Governments and the international community with cutting-edge and policy-relevant information on freshwater resources worldwide and is pioneering new techniques in gender-sensitive water monitoring. All of this will be vital in taking the 2030 Agenda to fruition.

Moving forward requires action across the field -- by Governments, by civil society and by the private sector. The challenges we face from climate change, water scarcity and the displacement of low-skilled workers are enormous. But promoting high-quality jobs, while preserving the environment and ensuring sustainable water management will help to eradicate poverty, promote growth and craft a future of decent work for all. This is UNESCO's message today.

Irina Bokova