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Message from

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

on the occasion of International Day for Biological Diversity

Water and Biodiversity

22 May 2013

We have not finished exploring the beauty of our planet's biological diversity, nor have we fully gauged its role in humanity's well-being and survival – yet we have begun to destroy it. This day of action is an opportunity to step up our mobilization to preserve biological diversity and to ensure that its benefits are shared by all.

We must start with water. All living creatures, be they on land, in the air or in the sea, need water. Some can live without light, others without oxygen, but none without water. Water is the common denominator of all biological diversity and a powerful lever for cooperation. This is why *Water and Biodiversity* has been selected as the theme for this year's International Day for Biological Diversity, coinciding with the International Year of Water Cooperation, which is being coordinated by UNESCO on behalf of UN-Water. This is an opportunity for us to join efforts to enhance fair and innovative water management arrangements and to share best practices for the preservation of wetlands – streams, lakes, coasts and marine zones – that play a substantial role in ensuring biodiversity.

We stand at the centre of complex web of water-biodiversity linkages. The water cycle determines biological diversity, and biological diversity in turn determines the water cycle and the local climate. Tropical rainforests draw water up from the soil and groundwater through the roots of trees and then release into the atmosphere quantities of water that fall as rain. The biodiversity of forests and oceans act as global heat regulators mitigating climate change by binding carbon. Ocean acidification endangers marine biodiversity, which in turn affects the food chain on which we depend. Biodiversity is not just another factor – it is as crucial to the living

world as is cultural diversity. Both sources of diversity are linked, and the future that we want to build depends on our collective ability to safeguard them both.

In a globalized world, this requires global, collective efforts. We must forge stronger scientific alliances to understand and protect the natural balances on which we depend, within the spirit of the Nagoya Protocol on access to and the sharing of the benefits of biological diversity, adopted in 2010. UNESCO draws on its cultural and scientific programmes to serve that cause. We have strong tools at hand. The UNESCO Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission participates in the international Blue Carbon Initiative to promote sustainable use of the oceans. UNESCO is an active partner in the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, established in 2012, and which is a great stride forward. For these initiatives to be successful, we need political mobilization at the highest level and awareness-raising within civil society and across the private and public sectors. Today, let us rally round a simple message – water-biodiversity linkages have moulded the world in which we live into a thing of beauty; we must preserve them for future generations.

Irina Bokova