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

on the occasion of the International Francophonie Day

«*Power of Words*»

20 March 2016

International Francophonie Day is an opportunity to celebrate the power of linguistic and cultural diversity as an accelerator of dialogue and mutual understanding, as a motor to promote peace, adding to the beauty of the world. This International Day is a moment to renew our friendship with the International Organisation of La Francophonie. It is also the moment to pay tribute to Mr Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who recently passed, who was the first Secretary-General of the International Organisation of La Francophonie and one of UNESCO's staunchest friends.

In 2016, we celebrate the "Power of Words" of the French language. Words have, indeed, the power to change reality, because to speak is to act. Violence, prejudice, racial and anti-Semitic acts proliferate when they are sustained by public speeches and words that render those behaviour acceptable. Against words that hurt and kill, we must choose words that appease, which draw on reason and intelligence to defend shared values and human rights. The world needs to hear words that prevent hatred – it needs to share words that appeal to dialogue and contribute to building peace, through education, culture, the sciences, communication and information.

Words are powerful only if everyone is free to speak in her or his own language and all women and men can use the full range of words, in every language. This is why freedom of expression is a core ally to linguistic diversity, to build a world that is free of prejudice. On occasion of *International Francophonie Day*, UNESCO celebrates French language, and the values it has been carried through history, guided by the conviction in everyone's fundamental right to express, in their own language, their aspiration for justice and peace.

Irina Bokova