



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Message from Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of the International Day
for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

21 March 2010

This day marks the 50th anniversary of a tragic moment in human civilisation, when police gunned down 69 anti-Apartheid demonstrators in the South African township of Sharpsville. That massacre appalled the world. To make sure it would never be forgotten, in 1966 the United Nations designated March 21 the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The world has come a long way since the Sharpsville massacre. The ignominy that was Apartheid has been consigned to history. All over the globe, legislation has been passed to outlaw racial discrimination. But, as we observe this Day, we have to remain keenly aware that the struggle to end racism is far from over. Today, our societies still have to struggle against racial hatred and discrimination.

In 2010, the Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination takes place in the broader context of the United Nations International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures. As lead agency for the Year, UNESCO is seeking to bring new impetus to the search for dialogue, tolerance and peace in our rapidly changing times. Globalisation has made the world a smaller place, bringing people together in ways that were formerly unimaginable. Yet while these dynamic processes bring positive benefits, they also generate new pressures and tensions that can lead to mistrust, resentment and hostility.

UNESCO unites all its fields of expertise in the struggle against racial discrimination. Education provides one important way of combating stereotypes and fighting racial prejudice. It is imperative that schools teach respect for others, appreciation for the rich variety of our world's cultures, and tolerance toward

differences that we may not necessarily understand. Without these values, human rights and fundamental freedoms cannot be preserved.

The effort to eliminate racism must involve a broad coalition of partners working at every level from the global to the local. An excellent example is a UNESCO initiative that has received wide-spread recognition, the International Coalition of Cities Against Racism and Discrimination. This ongoing educational and awareness-raising project brings the effort to end racial discrimination to the heart of urban areas, where various communities are often in closest proximity to one another.

Everyone has a role to play in ending racial discrimination, and it is only through constant vigilance that we can hope to achieve its demise. I commend all those already working towards this goal, and I urge opinion leaders, decision-makers, the media, teachers, community workers and citizens everywhere to join in our endeavours to make this a more racially tolerant world.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Irina Bokova', written in a cursive style.

Irina Bokova