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Message by

Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO,

on the occasion of Nelson Mandela International Day

18 July 2014

The celebration of Nelson Mandela International Day is particularly significant this year. Just months after the death of this icon of freedom, whose legacy was hailed by the whole world, we can gauge the indelible mark that he has left on history and the enduring relevance of his message.

Nelson Mandela changed much more than the fate of his own country. By struggling for freedom and dignity, he contributed to the advancement of human rights and universal recognition of the equality of all men and women. A political prisoner who became president, he chose the difficult path of dialogue, appeasement and mutual understanding, in order to put an end to the worst form of segregation and lead his country to reconciliation.

Mandela's journey embodies the bold spirit of peace and all of the energy needed to renounce the self-sustaining vicious circle of violence. His impressive statement from the dock at the Rivonia Trial, included in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register, remains one of the strongest expressions of the universal aspiration to "*a democratic and free society*".

This message stands at the heart of the mission of UNESCO, for which Nelson Mandela was a Goodwill Ambassador and winner of the Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize. In increasingly diverse and interconnected societies, the dialogue of cultures and respect for rights are more important than ever in building lasting peace. Tolerance can be built from human rights education and from knowledge of the history and memories of peoples, thanks to which minds re opened for mutual understanding and to prevent new forms of discrimination. The ancestral wisdom of

ubuntu is in fact the wisdom of our globalized world: we can only be fully ourselves when we respect others.

“It’s your turn now”, said Mandela at the end of his life, and the best way to honour his memory is, indeed, to continue ceaselessly, each of us in our own way, to ensure that his values are reflected in today’s societies.

Thank you, Madiba.

Irina Bokova