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Organización
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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 2011

The first article of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* affirms that “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” The 2011 *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* is an opportunity for all to recommit to defending and promoting this fundamental idea.

The *International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* has been accepted almost universally by States, but the imperative to fight discrimination remains as strong as ever. The world is changing before our eyes. Humanity is on the move more than ever before. Societies are becoming more complex. Diversity is not a choice but a reality across the world. Increasing proximity has not translated into greater understanding. In too many countries, individuals and communities suffer still the injustice of racism.

Racial discrimination is a narrowing of the world that reduces humanity and obscures the reality of our shared destiny. It lays the ground for tensions and mistrust that can lead to conflict. The stakes are high. The fabric of society is quickly torn and long to mend.

Tolerance of others is not enough. The passive acceptance of difference is insufficient. The equal dignity and rights of every individual must remain the starting point for all action, and the measure of its success. This requires dialogue on the basis of respect. It calls for understanding the wealth that lies in diversity. It means that all voices must be heard and all individuals included.

UNESCO was created to promote the democratic principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect of men and women through international cooperation in education, the sciences, culture and communication. UNESCO seeks to eliminate racial discrimination by fostering knowledge and understanding as the basis for greater interaction, dialogue and respect. These goals underpin all of our activities.

During this *International Year for People of African Descent* (2011), UNESCO is taking forward its work on the history of the Slave Routes and deepening support to human rights education.

UNESCO's *Coalition of Cities against Racism* is an example of innovative action against discrimination in an increasingly urbanized world. Thanks to this coalition, major cities on all continents are creating programmes that promote understanding between cultures and that seek to include all individuals fully into community life.

Events every day show that dignity and equality remain aspirations for people across the world. The 2011 *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination* is an opportunity to renew our pledge to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. These are the basis for healthy societies and strong states. They are foundation stones for sustainable peace and development in the 21st century.

Irina Bokova