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

**on the occasion of International Day  
for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination**

**21 March 2016**

In 2016, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination is marked by the fifteenth anniversary of the adoption of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2001.

Racial discrimination divides and kills. It impedes peace between States and undermines social cohesion within increasingly diverse societies. Sectarian ideologists rely on hatred of the other to carry out large-scale ethnic and cultural cleansing. Racial and religious-based slavery persists and is escalating in too many countries around the world. The historic refugee crisis serves as a pretext to foster prejudices and to foment rejection of others. We need more than ever to redouble efforts at the global level to build the defences against racism and intolerance in the minds of every individual and within common institutions.

To counter this evil, which feeds on ignorance and a hatred of others, UNESCO promotes global citizenship education and develops tools and expertise capable of enhancing mutual understanding, critical thinking and intercultural dialogue. The Slave Route Project raises awareness of the history of slavery and sounds the alarm about the resulting perceptions and forms of discrimination. Initiatives such as the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022) and the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) are powerful platforms for adding depth to the dialogue to strike down racial prejudice. The International Coalition of Cities against Racism, launched by UNESCO, forms a network for debate and action to strengthen public policies and programmes to

combat exclusion. In that same spirit, UNESCO has just launched a report on racism and discrimination in international football, which offers examples of best practice to disseminate in the world of sport.

Racial discrimination, which can be brutal and wide-ranging, is sometimes embodied in iniquitous laws. It can also insidiously, silently, deprive people each day of their basic rights to employment, housing and a social life. We all have a role to play, each at our respective levels, in combating racism. On this day, I call on Member States, civil society organizations and citizens to raise their voices and act to eliminate racial discrimination, as that is the sine qua non for building more inclusive, more tolerant and, hence, stronger and more sustainable societies.

Irina Bokova