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**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of African World Heritage Day**

5 May 2016

This first *African World Heritage Day* is very special.

This is an opportunity to celebrate the wealth of Africa's cultural and natural heritage, embodying outstanding universal values. This is a moment for the world to stand with Governments, local communities and societies to support one of the continent's most precious resources. Africa's cultural and natural heritage is a force for peace – it is also a driver of development and innovation.

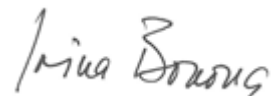
This is the inspiration of this International Day, proclaimed by UNESCO Member States in November 2015, to increase global awareness of African heritage and to mobilise greater cooperation for its safeguarding. This must include every actor, starting with school children, with young women and men and with all partners, including the *African World Heritage Fund*, celebrating its 10th anniversary this year.

Over the last decade, we have made great progress to increase the number of African sites on the World Heritage List – improving conservation and risk management, expanding community involvement and increasing benefits to local communities. Yet, out of the 129 cultural and natural sites on the African continent inscribed on the World Heritage List, 17 are also on the List of World Heritage in Danger. The list of threats is long, from armed conflict,

terrorism, poaching and global warming to uncontrolled urban expansion, and mineral and oil exploration, all of this unfolding amidst unprecedented economic and social transformations.

Protecting and promoting Africa's cultural and natural heritage resonates at the heart of UNESCO's work to promote respect and mutual understanding, to safeguard sources of belonging and creativity. This is also important to take forward the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* – safeguarding heritage helps create jobs, promote gender equality, eradicate poverty. There is no need to choose between heritage and growth, between beautiful landscapes and decent livelihoods – with the right skills and stronger capacities, we can harness the potential of heritage to create millions of decent jobs, giving also a sense of dignity, inclusion and pride. By protecting natural resources, rivers and parks, we can unleash extraordinary renewable energy source for all. This is the right thing to do, and the smart choice to make. This is UNESCO's message today.

This matters to Africa – it matters to women and men across the world, and especially to young people.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Irina Bokova". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Irina Bokova