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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of International Day of Nowruz

21 March 2016

Every year, men and women in western, central and southern Asia, the Caucasus, the Balkans and other regions come together to celebrate Nowruz, in a festivity marking the new year and the arrival of spring.

Inscribed on the *UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity* since 2009, Nowruz is an outstanding manifestation of how living cultural heritage expresses the way we understand the world and the means by which we shape it for the good of all. This celebration brings together local traditions, accompanied by rituals that vary from one community to another -- together they embody the shared human aspiration to experience moments of togetherness, solidarity and joy, representing a bridge from the past to the future, an annual commitment renewed to rising generations.

At a time when the living traditions of local communities are under increasing pressure, Nowruz is as an invitation to strengthen the roots of reconciliation and intercultural dialogue.

The rich variety of ways in which we celebrate the arrival of spring equinox reminds us of the responsibility we share towards our planet. Nowruz carries a message of renewal in a world of change, and leads us to reflect on the imperative of humanity standing together to protect biodiversity and eco-systems. As countries take forward the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Paris Climate Change Agreement, this has never been so important.

On this International Day of Nowruz, I express my best wishes to everyone celebrating, in the hope that we will all be inspired by this message of solidarity and peace.

Irina Bokova