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

1 December 2012

AIDS remains one of the world's most grave health challenges, tragically affecting families and weakening communities and societies. We must not relent in our efforts to achieve zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths.

On this *World AIDS Day*, we can be encouraged that our efforts are producing results. We must build on these to bring the disease under control, by scaling up HIV programmes and making the most of powerful new tools to prevent people from becoming infected and from dying from AIDS-related causes.

We are making headway. The number of people newly infected continues to fall across the world. The number of adults and children acquiring HIV infection in 2011 stands a full 20 percent lower than in 2001. It is encouraging that the number of people dying from AIDS-related causes in sub-Saharan Africa declined by 32 percent from 2005 to 2011 -- although the region still accounted for 70 percent of all people dying from AIDS in 2011. At the same time, it is sobering to note that globally 34 million people were living with HIV by the end of 2011. Steep challenges remain ahead.

As a UNAIDS Co-sponsor, UNESCO is fully aligned with UNAIDS to achieve zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. We work for this 'triple zero' goal by supporting countries to improve HIV and age-appropriate sexuality education for young people and by joining with all partners to focus on working with young people in their 'second decade,' aged between 10 and 20 years old. UNESCO responds to the needs of societies by situating its work within a broader context of health education and school health. We support ministries of

education and health to work together more effectively to ensure that young people have the knowledge and skills to lead healthier lives. Tackling gender inequalities is a special focus of our work, as women and girls are severely affected by HIV and bear the greatest burden of care.

Progress must strengthen our determination to create a world free of AIDS. HIV and AIDS can be conquered through renewed commitment and sustained solidarity. For this, we need to use every resource as best we can and draw on all available evidence. This is our message on this *World AIDS Day*.

Irina Bokova