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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the *International Day for Universal Access to
Information***

28 September 2016

Over two thousand years ago, Aristotle wrote: “*All human beings by nature desire to know.*”

To know requires having access to information – this fundamental human right is part of what makes us human, it is essential for inclusion and dialogue, it is a foundation for the rule of law and good governance, and it is vital for crafting new paths to sustainable development.

This is the message of the first *International Day for Universal Access to Information*, as decided by UNESCO Member States -- this is why access to information is a key driver for taking forward the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, to promote the human rights and dignity, to eradicate poverty, to build inclusive knowledge societies.

Equal and universal access to information is a powerful engine for positive change, widening opportunities to overcome inequalities, to reach the marginalised, to create and share knowledge, to discover other cultures, to strengthen the foundations of democratic institutions. In a globalising world, this right must be respected offline and online – the digital revolution must be a development revolution, drawing on the empowering force of new information and communication technologies, for inclusion and innovation.

This means breaking down all barriers to access, in connectivity, in skills. This is the importance of strong freedom of information laws and their effective implementation.

It was 250 years ago that contemporary Sweden and Finland adopted the world's first right to information legislation, as recognised in the *2016 World Press Freedom Day Finlandia Declaration*. To move forward, we must empower all women and men with awareness of their right of access to information, and we must advance media and information literacy skills so that all can harness this right for sustainable development.

These goals guide all of UNESCO's action, to support governments and societies, to ensure every woman and man enjoys full and equal access to information that is essential for their rights, dignity and empowerment.

This is UNESCO's message on this inaugural *International Day for Universal Access to Information*.

Irina Bokova