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

1 December 2016

UNESCO believes in education as the cornerstone of a sustainable and effective approach to HIV prevention. According to the 2016 Prevention Gap report, two-thirds of young people do not have correct and comprehensive knowledge of HIV. This, combined with such other factors as lack of access to services, stigma, discrimination, and structural inequalities, leads to a disproportionate impact for certain populations.

For example, despite significant efforts to strengthen the AIDS response, there are almost 2000 new HIV infections each week among adolescent girls and young women in South Africa. Education alone is not a magic bullet for prevention, but without it, other prevention approaches -- whether it be condoms or pre-exposure prophylaxis -- will never achieve their full promise.

On this basis, as a founder of the *United Nations Joint Programme on AIDS*, UNESCO joins the UNAIDS Secretariat and Cosponsoring partners in commemorating the first *World AIDS Day* in the era of the Sustainable Development Goals.

UNAIDS is marking this occasion with the “Hands up for HIV prevention” campaign, which calls for reinvigorating prevention efforts in order to keep the world on the fast-track to ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

For over two decades, UNESCO has been supporting countries to advance the prevention agenda, through work to promote comprehensive sexuality education, as well as through other important health issues, such as strengthening the education

sector response to substance use, and preventing violence in schools on the basis of gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.

This approach is encompassed in the new *UNESCO Strategy on Education for Health and Well-being*, which is aligned to the Sustainable Development Goals and the UNAIDS 2016-2021 Strategy, and which reflects growing recognition of the significant inter-linkages between education, health and well-being. This vision for comprehensive action is UNESCO's message on *World AIDS Day*, and it has never been so important.

Irina Bokova