



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of International Day for Biological Diversity

UNESCO and Island Biodiversity

22 May 2014

This year, the *International Day for Biological Diversity* is dedicated to “island biodiversity,” in line with the designation by the United Nations General Assembly of 2014 as the *International Year of Small Island Developing States*.

In September, Samoa will host the *Third International Conference of Small Island Developing States*. UNESCO is helping to prepare this major event, which will help to shape a new global sustainable development agenda to follow 2015. This agenda must recognize the importance of Small Island Developing States for global sustainable development.

Island biodiversity is essential here. Many islands and archipelagos have evolved unique biodiversity over time, with a high rate of endemism and particular conservation challenges, with species on small islands being particularly vulnerable to extinction.

The livelihoods and cultural identities of islanders have always been inextricably linked to biodiversity. However, with the presence of people and associated biodiversity — crops, livestock and pests — the risk of extinction to native biodiversity is especially high, and novel communities of species have largely replaced native island biodiversity in many places. Today, climate change, natural disasters, and skewed development are threatening the sustainability of human communities on islands as well as island biodiversity.

UNESCO is acting to address these challenges. The sub Network of Island and Coastal Biosphere Reserves (20 members) and the Network for Pacific Biosphere

Reserves (10 members) belong to the World Network of Biosphere Reserves under UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme. The World Heritage Convention also includes many natural sites on islands.

UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission is building the leadership capacity of the directors of marine and coastal sciences institutes, with a focus on Small Island Developing States, where livelihoods depend heavily on marine resources. The Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission's *Ocean Biogeographic Information System* is a gateway to the world's ocean biodiversity and biogeographic data and information, building and maintaining a global alliance of over 500 institutions in 56 countries, including in Small Island Developing States.

UNESCO is also working through such initiatives as *Climate Frontlines and Sandwatch*, to build the capacities of islanders and to develop networks that help communities to self-organise and create their own resources that are culturally sensitive and scientifically sound. This includes initiatives to help conserve island biodiversity.

Throughout all of this, UNESCO is committed to working with all partners for the implementation of the *Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States*, and the Organization is contributing full-steam to preparing a successful *Third International Conference of Small Island Developing States*.

As we shape the post-2015 development agenda, we must recognise the importance of island biodiversity and work together to ensure the conservation of this precious and irreplaceable natural resource, which is the basis of human well-being.

Irina Bokova