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Message from the Director-General of UNESCO,

Irina Bokova,

**on the occasion of the International Day
for the Elimination of Violence against Women**

From peace in the home to peace in the world: safe education for all

25 November 2015

Violence against women is a major obstacle to fulfilment of fundamental human rights. It is a direct threat to the lives and health of millions of girls and women. It is also a serious impediment to building inclusive, sustainable societies. It undermines society from within by creating a climate of fear – sometimes even in the home – that saps mutual trust and weakens the entire social fabric for both men and women without distinction.

This year the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is highlighting the ways in which such violence is prejudicial to girls' and women's education. Education is a non-negotiable human right. It is a prerequisite for full enjoyment of many other fundamental rights. Too many girls and women are having to leave school because of early or forced marriages. One girl in five admits that she is regularly bullied at school. In 2015, worldwide, one girl in ten aged 15 to 19 has already been a victim of sexual abuse – and too often this abuse occurs on the way to school or actually in school. School is the ideal place for gaining the confidence needed to grow and develop: it must be a safe haven for study. We cannot allow schools to be places of fear, violence and harassment.

Education is also our ally in combating abuse, protecting girls and helping them to protect themselves. With its partners, UNESCO is committed to promoting inclusive high-quality education for all. As part of the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, UNESCO is developing tools in Asia for teachers to combat discrimination against women and lessen abuse. With UN Women, we are developing policies to

help Member States eliminate school-related gender-based violence. In the Philippines, Senegal, South Africa, Lebanon, Argentina and elsewhere we are working with teachers' unions to find solutions. This is also the thrust of the resolution on "Learning without fear" adopted recently by the Executive Board of UNESCO.

No society can flourish if half its population is living in fear of violence and suffering from prejudice. It is time to draw attention to some simple principles. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. Just like men, women must be able to use their freedoms and make their own choices as well as playing their part in the decisions that determine the future course of society. They must receive equal pay for equal work. Twenty years after the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, at a time when the United Nations has just adopted a new global programme for sustainable development to 2030, women's equality and empowerment have never been more urgent. This international day is an opportunity to take action to ensure they are achieved.

Irina Bokova