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**Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO**

on the occasion of International Day for Disaster Reduction

Resilience is for life

13 October 2014

Vulnerability to natural hazards is increasing to alarming rates, as their frequency intensifies, and exacerbated by rapid population growth and ageing populations. The 2014 *International Day for Disaster Reduction* is dedicated to older people, to their needs and to their contribution to better planning and understanding disaster risks in their communities.

We know well that age is a major factor for evacuation during emergencies. Older people are also more vulnerable than younger groups to injuries resulting from such weather extremes as heatwaves, storms and floods. It is projected that by 2050, people over the age of sixty will represent 22 percent of the world's population, twice the current number. This is why we must start today to include the concerns of older people in all planning and preparations to mitigate the risks of disasters.

We must also listen more carefully to the voices of older people, whose contribution to tackling environment challenges is underestimated. Our elders are forces for resilience, thanks to their understanding of natural phenomena, including within traditional knowledge systems and those of indigenous people. This vast reservoir of knowledge can help in improving preparedness as well as in preventing disasters, thanks to the wisdom that older people can share about local phenomena. Mitigating the risks of disasters must build on local foundations, drawing on the views and needs of local communities, who are the first affected by natural disasters.

This was a key message that UNESCO sent at the 3rd *International Conference on Small Island Developing States*, held in Apia, Samoa, during the High-Level Event on *Coping with and adapting to Ocean Threats for Resilient SIDS Communities*. UNESCO is acting across all areas of its mandate and across the world to build a global culture of resilience for local communities. In Viet Nam, we have been working with media institutions to train journalists in producing written and broadcast material that highlights the vulnerability of older people, as well as women and children, during evacuation situations and calling for more inclusive prevention plans.

Resilience is more than simply recovery from adversity — it must be about building stronger societies today to prepare for tomorrow. On this *International Day for Disaster Reduction*, I call on all Governments and all relevant actors to integrate older people in programmes and plans of disaster risk reduction, and to ensure the participation of local communities into all stages of planning. This is essential to lay the ground for a more sustainable world for all.

Irina Bokova