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Message from

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

on the occasion of World Oceans Day

UNESCO, 8 June 2012

A few days before the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, World Oceans Day provides us with an opportunity to remember a simple truth: our planet Earth is primarily a blue planet.

The oceans cover 70 per cent of the surface of the globe. They are the lungs of the planet and provide much – if not most – of the oxygen that we breathe. The oceans are also the world's primary thermal regulator, absorbing more than one quarter of the carbon dioxide released by human activities.

Furthermore, ocean protection is an economic and social priority. Millions of jobs in industry, tourism, transport and energy depend on the sea. More than 40 per cent of the world's population live within 100 kilometres of the coast. More than one billion people obtain most of their animal protein from the oceans. Most of the world's large cities, such as Rio, Tokyo, Karachi and Manila, are on the coast. These extremely dynamic areas are on the front line of global warming, rising sea levels and tsunamis. Green growth and sustainable development are predicated on the responsible management of the oceans' resources and coastal areas.

We must first improve our knowledge of the oceans in order to improve their protection. We have incredibly little knowledge of the oceans' importance to our future. Barely one per cent of the planet's oceans are currently protected. This is not enough. Plastic waste dumped at sea accumulates in "patches" covering several million square kilometres, trapped by currents, with disastrous effects on flora and fauna. Ocean protection requires much stronger legal, scientific and

political cooperation among nations. UNESCO wishes to boost scientific cooperation in this field, through the endeavours of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC). UNESCO will ensure that the oceans' role is clearly acknowledged at Rio+20, in view of its manifold effects on social justice, preservation of the environment and economic efficiency.

The Rio+20 Conference is a major turning point in defining “the future that we want”, and the oceans must be included in the blueprint for the new development model. Today, World Oceans Day, I call on all policy-makers, industrialists and civil-society stakeholders to be mobilized to achieve this goal. Our common future depends on it.

Irina Bokova