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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities

3 December 2016

Every year, *International Day of Persons with Disabilities* is an opportunity for the world to stand together against the discrimination of women and men with disabilities and to raise the flag for inclusion and empowerment through education, the sciences, culture and communication and information.

The *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* connects inclusion and development – this is vital, because persons with disabilities continue to face discrimination, violence, stigma, and exclusion. This is particularly true for the most vulnerable groups in society, such as migrants, refugees and indigenous people with disabilities. Women and girls also shoulder heavy burdens, lacking opportunities, at greater risk from abuse, violence and exclusion. These challenges throw a shadow over societies as a whole.

In this year of action to take forward the 2030 Agenda, our message is clear -- sustainable development will not be possible without the full inclusion of persons with disabilities at every level, without their roles and voices built into all decision-making and policies.

UNESCO is pulling out all the stops to support implementation of the *2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* and to take forward the new Sustainable Development Goals. We need redoubled efforts to ensure that all women and men with disabilities around the world are integrated fully into all aspects of social, political, cultural and economic life, to build a world that is pluralistic, open, participatory and knowledge-based. This is how our societies will become truly inclusive.

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This must begin with education. UNESCO is leading support to its Member States to implement SDG4-Education 2030, which commits all countries to ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training, regardless of disability status.

We must raise visibility for stronger advocacy. This is the importance of the *UNESCO/Emir Jaber al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah Prize for Digital Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities*, which will recognize this year the outstanding contribution of individuals and organizations in promoting the inclusion and accessibility, and enhancing the lives of persons with disabilities through application of digital solutions, resources and technologies.

UNESCO has also revised the *International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport*, to reinforce physical education, physical activity and sport around the world, and the Organisation is accompanying Member States in reviewing national physical education policies to become child-centered, flexible, sensitive, and inclusive, independently of abilities.

In this spirit, we dedicate the 2016 *International Day of Persons with Disabilities* to promoting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, to build together a more inclusive and equitable world for all.

Irina Bokova