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Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of International Women's Day

8 March 2018

Every year on 8 March, the international community celebrates International Women's Day. It is an occasion to give particular resonance, worldwide, to the struggle to achieve equality between men and women, and to launch initiatives that will raise awareness and help to change mindsets.

The promotion of gender equality is one of UNESCO's global priorities. In all the fields within its mandate – education, culture, science, communication and information – UNESCO is committed to encouraging the access of girls and women to all types of education and training, removing barriers that hinder their personal and professional development, and enabling them to be better represented in cultural life, science and the media. Whether through its literacy programmes for young girls or its patronage of already experienced women scientists, UNESCO is multiplying its initiatives to fight discrimination against girls and women and promote their skills and talents.

This year, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women has proposed to highlight women's participation and representation in the media and information and communication technologies.

According to a recent report,[1] the inequalities in access to digital media are diminishing globally, for all populations across the world. However, this general trend conceals another, which is worrying to say the least: an increasing gap between the number of men and women with an online presence. In 2016, there were 250 million more men than women online.

Women are not only less connected, they are also generally less well trained in digital

[1] Published by the Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development and co-authored by UNESCO, 2017.

technologies; they are less likely to find employment in the high-tech sector, and when they do, they earn less than their male colleagues. In addition, journalists, bloggers, authors, artists and public figures often face different forms of violence on the Internet and social media, such as insults, threats and harassment. Many women thus prefer to withdraw from cyberspace than be exposed to this unacceptable violence.

UNESCO is at the forefront of the fight against gender discriminations, deconstructing the stereotypes that spread through the media. It uses its mandate as an agency dedicated to information and communication to lead the fight both *in* the media and *through* the media.

This year, on International Women's Day, UNESCO is launching, in collaboration with Sweden, an initiative that is both fun and informative: the "Edit-a-thon". The idea is to give women greater visibility on Wikipedia pages, where they are underrepresented. Only one biography out of six is currently devoted to a woman. In an attempt to gradually re-establish a balance, many volunteers will come to UNESCO Headquarters and, assisted by Wikipedia trainers, will draft and publish biographies of women whose achievements in the fields of culture, education and science are undeniable, but who do not yet feature in the online encyclopaedia.

This initiative, which aims to combat the symbolic violence circulating in the digital world and the media, is but one example in a series of programmes launched by UNESCO and its partners. For instance, "Women Make the News", which is marking its nineteenth anniversary this year, is an annual meeting where, for one month, from 8 March to 8 April, editors-in-chief, journalists, bloggers and the public are invited to take the "gender equality check-up" to test their degree of awareness of respect for gender equality. To enable such action, UNESCO and its partners have developed useful "gender equality indicators".

Another initiative supported by UNESCO is "YouthMobile", which aims to train youths to programme mobile applications on smartphones, with a view to devising sustainable development solutions, particularly targeting young girls, who are underrepresented in this technological field of activity.

UNESCO encourages all stakeholders in communication and information media to draw inspiration from these initiatives, to propose new ones and to rally to promote respect for true equality between men and women in the media.