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pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

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

**on the occasion of the *International Day of Peace*, 21 September 2011**

**“Peace and Democracy: Make Your Voice Heard”**

**21 September 2011**

Peace is more than the absence of war. It lies in the dignity of every woman and man. It is the tie that binds societies together in harmony with our environment. It is the foundation of legitimate states and the basis for stable international relations.

This vision created the United Nations. It is the goal that leads all of UNESCO's activities.

The 2011 *International Peace Day* is a chance to consider the stakes of peace in a world moving more quickly every day.

People are more connected today than ever before. Information and communication technologies are opening new worlds for expression and action. Social media are creating new platforms for participation and democracy. At the same time, women and men across the world struggle still against the terrors of violence and conflict. A global economic crisis is hitting hard, leaving millions to suffer the deprivations of poverty and marginalisation.

In turbulent times, we must remain true to the core values of peace. Peace starts with justice and dignity for every woman and man. It begins with the ability of each of us, across the world, to imagine a better world and work to create it. It is embodied in the humanist ambitions of the Millennium Development Goals.

UNESCO's 1945 Constitution states “if wars start in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” Young minds are some of the most powerful defences of peace.

Young women and men are changing the world already every day. Their struggle for dignity, rights and justice has led them this year to take to the streets, to mobilize campaigns and to build movements for peaceful change. New horizons for human dignity are opening.

In this *International Youth Year*, we salute these peaceful aspirations and we must rise to the expectations that drive them. We must engage with the ideas of young women and men and ensure their rightful place in all societies. Their voices must be heard and, more importantly, listened to.

UNESCO works every day to support young people in bolstering democratic values and institutions, based on justice, equality, and respect for human rights. We act to strengthen a culture of peace and non-violence through intercultural and interfaith dialogue, and by fostering mutual understanding and promoting reconciliation. We seek to empower young people with new skills to speak out and opportunities to act for peaceful change.

These are the goals of the Youth Forum that UNESCO will hold in Paris on 17-20 October on the theme of "How Youth Drive Change." With participants from across the world and moderated by the UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Forest Whitaker, the Forum will provide a global platform for crafting new approaches to reconciliation and conflict resolution.

Young women and men are torch-bearers for a more peaceful world. We must support their aspirations, we must listen to their views and we must act on their dreams. This is our message for the 2011 *International Peace Day*.

Irina Bokova