



**Message from the Director-General of UNESCO
on International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
(21 March 2002)**

Today, 21 March 2002, is the first International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which is being celebrated following the holding, in Durban, South Africa, of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance.

This Conference, which took forward the work initiated by the 1978 and 1983 conferences, has lent a second wind to the long and patient fight against the scourges of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. The Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by consensus, and endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly on 26 February 2002, recommend that action be taken on three fronts: enhanced prevention of acts of discrimination, harsher punishment for racist offences, and the provision of more effective support to victims in their struggle for dignity, equity and justice.

Mindsets have thus evolved. All countries today recognize unequivocally that racism and discrimination affect their respective societies and represent a threat to their own security and stability.

Furthermore, a decisive step forward has been taken in our attitudes to the tragedies of the past. Slavery and the slave trade are now recognized as crimes against humanity and as being among the major sources of racism.

Today more than ever, we must redouble our vigilance. New forms of discrimination and exclusion are appearing which are poised to jeopardize the gains stemming from past efforts. We must renew our approaches and strategies in order to respond more effectively to these phenomena. In the face of these diverse forms of extremism, which are raising new barriers between individuals and between cultures, it is increasingly a matter of urgency to mobilize, together, against the destructive forces of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia.

The follow-up to the Durban Conference, and the implementation of its recommendations, afford us a fresh opportunity to do so.

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