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Organización
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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the First World Tsunami Awareness Day

5 November 2016

On November 5th, 1854, an earthquake with a magnitude of 8,4, later to be known as the Ansei Nankai Earthquake, provoked a tsunami that was to hit Hiromura, a little village in Western Japan. Hamaguchi Goryo, a farmer, noticed the lowering of the tide and the rapid decrease of the water in his well and anticipated the tsunami. To warn the villagers and guide them to higher grounds, he set fire to his precious harvest, in an act that would become known as “Inamura no Hi” (the burning of rice sheaves). From the hilltop, the villagers saw the enormous wave destroy their village. Thanks to the heroic act of Hamaguchi Goryo, the village could escape the Tsunami that destroyed 30,000 buildings and 3,000 human lives.

This year we honor the first World Tsunami Awareness Day on 5 November, a date that has been chosen to coincide with “Inamura no Hi”.

This first World Tsunami Awareness Day focusses on education and evacuation drills – two areas where UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission has been at the forefront. Following the 26 December 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, UNESCO coordinated the development of a Global Tsunami Warning System, today fully operational and extending services to countries in the Indian Ocean, the Caribbean and the North Eastern Atlantic, Mediterranean and connected seas. But early warning system are not enough to save lives. Experience shows the crucial importance of teaching and learning about natural disasters and tsunamis in schools. UNESCO assists member states through education programmes and regular evacuation exercises, building on UNESCO Associated Schools Network (ASPnet), with 10 000 member institutions in over 180 countries.

The world has changed since “Inamura no Hi”. Building Tsunami resilience is a long term effort, but it is encouraging to see that over a million people were evacuated in no time following the Illapel earthquake that hit Chili on 16 September 2015, and that the ensuing tsunami made no casualties.

On this first World Tsunami Awareness Day, UNESCO’s message is clear. Tsunami Warning is research and knowledge-sharing at its very best. It calls for more synergies among scientific research, technology and education, building also on the wealth of indigenous knowledge and local cultures to better understand our environment and protect human lives. It needs more and better funding, it requires more and stronger cooperation. Let us all commit to strengthen even further the resilience of societies, through Disaster Risk Reduction and Tsunami Warning. This is key to take the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development forward. This is key to help millions of people live in dignity and security.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Irina Bokova". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Irina Bokova