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

on the occasion of Nelson Mandela International Day

18 July 2017

In one of his historic speeches at the Rivonia trial, whose archives are inscribed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register, Nelson Mandela stated:

"I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die."

Even today, despite the decades that separate us from these words, the ideal so cherished by Nelson Mandela remains a dream for far too many societies. Thousands of women and men around the world are still imprisoned, tortured and executed for defending this ideal of peace and equality in their country.

In celebrating *Nelson Mandela International Day*, we honour those who fought and continue to fight for freedom, dignity and human rights. This struggle has never been more important in societies today that are weakened by rising and multiple tensions -- economic, social, political as well as climatic.

More than ever, we must renew our commitment to the values of this great humanist defender of the oppressed, who also honoured UNESCO as a Goodwill Ambassador, in order to build societies where every woman and man can live together in diversity and respect.

Irina Bokova