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联合国教育、
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**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of International Day for Tolerance**

16 November 2019

“What is tolerance? It is the prerogative of humanity. We are all full of weakness and errors; let us mutually pardon each other our follies – it is the first law of nature.” It was these words that the thinker Voltaire used in his essay on toleration in 1764, to invite humanity to strive towards dialogue and peace; and 255 years later, his message has lost none of its relevance.

What this definition tells us is that tolerance is more than standing idly by or remaining insensitive to differences between men and women, cultures and beliefs.

Tolerance is indeed a state of mind, an awareness and a requirement; it is to realize that cultural diversity is a form of wealth, not a factor of division; it is to perceive that each culture, beyond immediate or apparent differences, is a constituent part of universality and speaks the common language of humanity. Tolerance is, in short, *“a virtue that makes peace possible”* as Kofi Annan said.

Since its foundation, UNESCO has aimed to build peace in the minds of men and women by combating the intolerance that still too often tears our societies apart, and by relentlessly fighting all forms of racism and discrimination.

Through programmes of global citizenship education and prevention of violent extremism; through a constant call for dialogue among peoples; through promotion of a “culture of peace” built on inclusion and mutual respect, UNESCO bears and echoes the message of tolerance, true to its mission of being *“the conscience of the United Nations”* as former Director-General Federico Mayor once said.

At a time when extremism and fanaticism are unleashed too often, at a time when the venom of hatred continues to poison a part of humanity, tolerance has never been more vital a virtue.

“[T]he practice of tolerance does not mean toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one’s convictions”, as it says in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance adopted by UNESCO in 1995; “[i]t means that one is free to adhere to one’s own convictions and accepts that others adhere to theirs”.

On this International Day, UNESCO invites you all to share this message of tolerance and peace.