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**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of World Environment Day,
on the theme of biodiversity**

5 June 2020

Every year, in late May and early June, UNESCO celebrates three major international days which are an important opportunity to consider together the three systemic pillars of climate change: biodiversity, climate and the oceans.

This day of 5 June is an occasion to celebrate the environment. It allows us to recall that the environment is a whole, a complex system wherein, climate the oceans and the diversity of living organisms and their surroundings interact sometimes in ways that are beyond our ability to anticipate.

This year, as the world struggles with an unprecedented pandemic, these days resonate more urgently than ever.

Over the past year, the environmental crisis has revealed itself in a spectacular and disturbing manner. While wildfires ravaged tropical rainforests as if they were arid savannah, dramatically highlighting the effects of climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic has cast yet another harsh light on the crisis affecting biodiversity.

The pandemic has allowed us to observe what scientists the world over have been saying for years: the interdependence between humanity and biodiversity is so profound that the latter's vulnerabilities are our own.

This health crisis is a warning that we must heed collectively: we must now fundamentally rethink our relationship with the living world, with natural ecosystems and their biodiversity.

Together we must construct a new pact with the living world. This is an immense work in progress. It will require a broad consensus, both technical and ethical.

UNESCO is one of the places where such a consensus can be built.

UNESCO has a vocation to foster relations and dialogue. This has been at the heart of its mission since its foundation. A re-establishment of our pact with the living world can only be done collectively, through dialogue and exchange. UNESCO, with its intellectual and standard-setting mandate, is “the conscience of the United Nations”, as one of its illustrious founders, Leon Blum, put it. UNESCO must therefore be one of the places where this global conversation can take place.

UNESCO can also offer its own experience: through its Man and Biosphere Programme, it can draw on sites and networks that bear testament to the possibility of living in harmony with nature, in regenerated ecosystems that are preserved for the sake of future generations.

Finally, UNESCO can highlight its specific expertise, notably in the field of education, since environmental education is crucial to this new deal: greater attentiveness, sensitivity and openness to the living world with its extraordinary richness, the capacity to admire and feel humbled before it, to understand our responsibility and grasp the concrete actions that are possible, all these require education.

On this World Environment Day, celebrating the theme of biodiversity, let us recall the words of David Attenborough, the broadcaster who has dedicated part of his life to speaking on behalf of our beautiful and diverse living world: “in our hands now lies not only our own future, but that of all other living creatures with whom we share the earth”.