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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 the

International Day for Universal Access to Information

28 September 2020

In a world where COVID-19 has caused chaos and complexity, access to reliable and verified information is more important than ever. Information is essential for encouraging healthy behaviours and saving lives – rumours and inaccurate information can be as lethal as viruses. In the words of António Guterres, the UN Secretary-General, “In the face of this lethal disease, we must do our utmost to halt deadly misinformation.”

We know what we need to do to bring this about. As these last few months have shown, public health requires transparency – whether this means statistics on the scale of the pandemic, or data on public spending. Access to accurate and trustworthy information ensures accountability for actions undertaken in response to the challenges caused by the virus, as the global community works to “build back better”.

In this context, 28 September, which marks the first celebration of the International Day for Universal Access to Information since its proclamation by the 74th session of the United Nations General Assembly, is of crucial importance.

On this occasion, UNESCO is partnering with the rest of the UN family to acknowledge the right to information as key to enabling broader access to data, information and knowledge – and empowering citizens in their efforts to build brighter futures.

The online events planned for the International Day will highlight how the right to information can help rise to these challenges. The events will also underline the

importance of statutory guarantees for public access to information to save lives, build trust and develop inclusive policies.

This commitment will only be effective if it is truly universal. In other words, in line with the goal set by States in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it must leave no one behind. This is why we urge governments to adopt access to information legislation, and to strengthen the implementation of such guarantees where these already exist.

As we know, this will take determination and drive. Governments must commit to the common good – by developing the innovative use of digital technologies for building resilient information infrastructures, and by creating favourable environments for safe and transparent data collection mechanisms that strengthen record keeping and enable accurate analysis of issues in the public interest. Moreover, these tools will only be effective if they are freely accessible and align with international privacy standards.

At UNESCO, we firmly believe that access to information must be recognized as a norm in sustainable development, and as a prerequisite for countries to respect, promote and protect human rights for all. As we rebuild and readapt our societies to the “new normal”, the right to information must be at the centre of efforts to ensure a more informed and resilient tomorrow.