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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

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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 World Philosophy Day**

19 November 2020

World Philosophy Day in 2020 is, in more ways than one, exceptional. It is being celebrated in the midst of a health crisis, an economic crisis, a climate crisis and an existential crisis. The current pandemic is challenging many aspects of our societies, namely how we relate to our communities, to our condition as individuals and to our economic and political systems.

This Day is therefore particularly meaningful this year. It gives us the opportunity to celebrate much more than an academic discipline or a human science, but a certain way of being in the world, made all the more necessary by the context in which we live today.

Philosophy is in fact the fundamental process by which individuals relate to themselves and position themselves in the world.

Far from being separate from life, philosophy contemplates, questions and determines life. According to the Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne, philosophical activity “has a hold on human life”, providing a capacity to put things into perspective, shared by all cultures. Whether through formalized systems, spiritual traditions, or written and oral heritage, philosophy is a way of viewing and considering the world, rather than merely a subject matter; it is very much alive and in action.

This is why philosophy is so necessary and valuable in times of “rough weather”, to borrow a phrase from contemporary French philosopher Vincent Descombes. At times of great uncertainty, philosophy is more relevant than ever, because by

questioning the world it enables us to resist all forms of reductionism, and to see a bigger picture.

During this turning point in the history of humanity, philosophy is an exceptional tool for understanding technological, environmental and human transformations, both conceptual and practical.

In order to find answers to contemporary challenges, UNESCO relies daily on the resources of philosophy: by listening to all philosophies, including indigenous ones, in order to rebuild our relationship with nature; by asking philosophers to reflect upon the ethical principles of artificial intelligence; or, in the midst of the crisis, to look ahead and imagine the world of tomorrow through, for example, the series of videos called “Women’s Voices”.

In the face of unprecedented crises and events, we are not unarmed. This World Day should be an occasion to celebrate philosophy, to remember that it provides some distance and comfort, and that it consolidates existence. It should also be an occasion to promote the practice of philosophy, from supporting university research to teaching philosophy to children as a way of opening their eyes to the world around them.

On this World Philosophy Day, UNESCO therefore invites you to put into practice this intellectual distancing, which is the first step towards a lasting solution to the crises we are going through.

Happy World Philosophy Day to all!