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**Message from Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on the occasion of World Oceans Day**

8 June 2011

Oceans shape the earth's climate and influence the distribution of the globe's ecosystems and biodiversity. This 2011 World Oceans Day is an opportunity to celebrate the importance of oceans for the well-being of the planet and humanity and to take a step forward in championing their cause.

The 'blue economy' of oceans is central to our daily lives. At least one in four persons relies on sea food as their primary source of protein. Half of the world's population is settled on the first 50km of coastal areas. Ninety percent of the world's trade is carried by shipping. With technological progress, economic activities in coastal zones and deeper waters continue to intensify and to diversify.

The importance of oceans is not matched by our knowledge. More than 1,500 people have climbed Mount Everest, and 12 have walked on the moon, but only two divers have descended to and returned from the deepest part of the ocean. UNESCO's Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission has promoted marine science and research for fifty years, but the fact remains that oceans are still relatively unexplored.

Knowledge of oceans has long been driven by the need to access and exploit their resources. This must change. The challenge today is to use marine science to understand and protect oceans, in order to better manage their ecosystems and biodiversity for present and future generations.

The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, to be held in June 2012 in Brazil, provides a unique opportunity to tackle this challenge. We must work now to prepare concrete commitments on oceans for the 2012 Conference.

We have one year to consult with all major actors, to coordinate visions and to secure new political commitment on ocean sustainability. The challenge is high, but so is our collective responsibility to develop a new approach to oceans that champions their central role for the planet and our lives. These are the stakes of this World Oceans Day.

Irina Bokova