

# International Day for Tolerance - 16 November 2017

*"Non-violence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our being" - Mahatma Gandhi*

***In a world of diversity, tolerance is a prerequisite for peace. It is also a lever for sustainable development, as it encourages the construction of more inclusive and thus more resilient societies that are able to draw on the ideas, creative energy and talents of each of their members.***

Tolerance is often a minority idea and one that is sometimes threatened. In too many countries in the world I have noted the rise of doctrines based on withdrawal and rejection. I have noted that migratory crises, the tragic situation of refugees and armed conflicts are being used as tools to whip up hatred of the other, stigmatize minorities and legitimize discrimination. I have heard the rise in racist attitudes and stereotyping of religions and cultures, as it is said that different peoples cannot live together and that the world would be a better place if we returned to olden times when "pure cultures" lived alone, protected from outside influence, in a mythicized past that has never existed.

We must counter this tendency to isolationism by restoring strength and substance to the culture of tolerance. We must again emphasize the extent to which cultures are enriched by mutual exchange. We must remember the historical facts, recall how peoples and identities have mingled, engendering richer, more complex cultures with multiple identities. Using the living testimony of world heritage sites, we can show that no culture has ever grown in isolation, and that diversity is a strength, not a weakness. We must say again that tolerance is not naive or passive acceptance of difference: it is a fight for the respect of fundamental rights. Tolerance is not relativism or indifference. It is a commitment renewed every day to seek in our diversity the bonds that unite humanity.

The promotion of the spirit of tolerance is the source and purpose of UNESCO's actions. It is inspired by the [Declaration of Principles on Tolerance](#), adopted in 1995. It draws on many educational, cultural and scientific programmes, in the framework of the [International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures \(2013-2022\)](#), the [International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities](#), and the promotion of global citizenship education. These programmes need to be supported and relayed by public policies, in official speeches and in daily behaviour, in the media and in the streets of our towns and cities. I call upon all UNESCO's Member States and all the citizens of the world to take up this message, to build together societies that are more inclusive, more peaceful and more prosperous, because they are more tolerant.

**Message from Ms Irina Bokova, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of International Day for Tolerance November 16, 2016**

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The United Nations is committed to strengthening tolerance by fostering mutual understanding among cultures and peoples. This imperative lies at the core of the United Nations Charter, as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and is more important than ever in this era of rising and violent extremism and widening conflicts that are characterized by a fundamental disregard for human life.

<http://www.un.org/en/events/toleranceday/multimedia.shtml>

[Declaration of Principles on Tolerance](#). Among other things, the Declaration affirms that tolerance is neither indulgence nor indifference. It is respect and appreciation of the rich variety of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. Tolerance recognizes the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others. People are naturally diverse; only tolerance can ensure the survival of mixed communities in every region of the globe.

# How Can Intolerance Be Countered?

## 1. Fighting intolerance requires law:

Each Government is responsible for enforcing human rights laws, for banning and punishing hate crimes and discrimination against minorities, whether these are committed by State officials, private organizations or individuals. The State must also ensure equal access to courts, human rights commissioners or ombudsmen, so that people do not take justice into their own hands and resort to violence to settle their disputes.

## 2. Fighting intolerance requires education:

Laws are necessary but not sufficient for countering intolerance in individual attitudes. Intolerance is very often rooted in ignorance and fear: fear of the unknown, of the other, other cultures, nations, religions. Intolerance is also closely linked to an exaggerated sense of self-worth and pride, whether personal, national or religious. These notions are taught and learned at an early age. Therefore, greater emphasis needs to be placed on educating more and better. Greater efforts need to be made to teach children about tolerance and human rights, about other ways of life. Children should be encouraged at home and in school to be open-minded and curious. Education is a life-long experience and does not begin or end in school. Endeavours to build tolerance through education will not succeed unless they reach all age groups, and take place everywhere: at home, in schools, in the workplace, in law-enforcement and legal training, and not least in entertainment and on the information highways.

## 3. Fighting intolerance requires access to information:

Intolerance is most dangerous when it is exploited to fulfil the political and territorial ambitions of an individual or groups of individuals. Hatemongers often begin by identifying the public's tolerance threshold. They then develop fallacious arguments, lie with statistics and manipulate public opinion with misinformation and prejudice. The most efficient way to limit the influence of hatemongers is to develop policies that generate and promote press freedom and press pluralism, in order to allow the public to differentiate between facts and opinions.

## 4. Fighting intolerance requires individual awareness:

Intolerance in a society is the sum-total of the intolerance of its individual members. Bigotry, stereotyping, stigmatizing, insults and racial jokes are examples of individual expressions of intolerance to which some people are subjected daily. Intolerance breeds intolerance. It leaves its victims in pursuit of revenge. In order to fight intolerance individuals should become aware of the link between their behavior and the vicious cycle of mistrust and violence in society. Each one of us should begin by asking: am I a tolerant person? Do I stereotype people? Do I reject those who are different from me? Do I blame my problems on 'them'?

## 5. Fighting intolerance requires local solutions:

Many people know that tomorrow's problems will be increasingly global but few realize that solutions to global problems are mainly local, even individual. When confronted with an escalation of intolerance around us, we must not wait for governments and institutions to act alone. We are all part of the solution. We should not feel powerless for we actually possess an enormous capacity to wield power. Nonviolent action is a way of using that power-the power of people. The tools of nonviolent action-putting a group together to confront a problem, to organize a grassroots network, to demonstrate solidarity with victims of intolerance, to discredit hateful propaganda-are available to all those who want to put an end to intolerance, violence and hatred.