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Message

to the participants of the award ceremony of the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award (2013)

To be delivered by Ms Ângela Melo,
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Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

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It is a pleasure to greet all the participants in this ceremony to award the **Nuremberg International Human Rights Award**. I especially thank Dr. **Ulrich Maly, Lord Mayor of Nuremberg**, for supporting the Award and organizing this important event.

Let me offer a special word of thanks to this year's winner of the Award, human rights activist from Uganda **Ms Kasha Jacqueline Nabagesera**, for her active work as a civil society leader to defend human dignity and rights of persons who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT).

Dear **Kasha**, this Award honours your courage to speak out against acts of violence and discrimination directed at members of sexual minorities. Thanks to unshrinking commitment of individuals like you, a remarkable progress was achieved over the recent years in ending decades of silence about this issue. Today the need for action to end these violations is increasingly widely recognized, if not universally accepted.

This year, the Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova in her Message on the occasion of the *International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia (17 May)* stressed "the growing momentum of commitment and efforts across the world to address homophobia and transphobia. Within the United Nations, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has shown extraordinary leadership in condemning homophobia and transphobia and in promoting the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people".

Indeed, on Human Rights Day in 2010, the United Nations Secretary-General declared that: “As men and women of conscience, we reject discrimination in general, and in particular discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. When individuals are attacked, abused or imprisoned because of their sexual orientation, we must speak out. We cannot stand by. We cannot be silent”. He underlined that homosexuality is considered a crime in far too many countries: “Laws criminalizing people on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity violate the principle of non-discrimination. They also fuel violence, help to legitimize homophobia and contribute to a climate of hate”. “This is not right... Yes, we recognize that social attitudes run deep. Yes, social change often comes only with time. Yet, let there be no confusion: where there is tension between cultural attitudes and universal human rights, universal human rights must carry the day. Personal disapproval, even society’s disapproval, is no excuse to arrest, detain, imprison, harass or torture anyone – ever.” The position of the United Nations Secretary-General on this issue serves a source of inspiration for all members of the UN family.

In June 2011, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 17/19¹ – the first United Nations resolution on human rights, sexual orientation and gender identity. The resolution expressed “grave concern” at violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Its adoption paved the way to the first official United Nations report on “Discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity”, prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in November 2011. That report, based on empirical evidence, concluded that prejudice, stigmatization and deeply embedded homophobic attitudes expose many LGBT people of all ages and in all regions of the world to violations of their human rights – from discrimination in employment, health care and education, to criminalization and targeted physical attacks, even killings. These attacks constitute a form of gender-based violence, driven by a desire to punish those seen as defying gender norms. They are often combined with a lack of adequate legal protection against discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity. In some 76 countries, discriminatory laws criminalize private, consensual same-sex relationships – exposing individuals to the risk of arrest, prosecution and imprisonment. Only few States have laws that offer comprehensive protection from discrimination. Even less have efficient systems for combating, or even recording, homophobic hate crimes. The report included a set of recommendations addressed to States designed to strengthen protection of the human rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons. The report’s findings formed the basis of a panel discussion that took place at the Council on 7 March 2012 – the first time a United Nations intergovernmental body had held a formal debate on the issue;

As the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights have both said repeatedly, there is an urgent need to challenge homophobia at its roots – through public education, training and information.

¹ A/HRC/RES/17/19.

As part of these efforts, UNESCO launched a global initiative in 2011 to prevent and combat homophobic and transphobic bullying in education -- to ensure that educational settings are safe places, free of discrimination and violence against LGBT students and educators, where all students have internalised the principle that all human beings, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity, are equal in dignity and rights. This initiative has been praised by many Governments, educators, students, parents and communities, including LGBT people themselves. In December 2011, UNESCO organized in Brazil the first-ever United Nations-sponsored technical consultation on homophobic bullying in educational institutions. These consultations brought together experts from 25 countries, to explore examples of good policies and practices. The discussions showed what can be done, *whatever* the context, to ensure the right to education for all. UNESCO's 2012 booklet on *Education Sector Responses to Homophobic Bullying* has already been translated into seven languages at the request of Member States.

Protecting the rights of lesbians, gays, bisexual and transgender people is not a matter for one category or another. It concerns us all. Their struggle for dignity contributes to the universality of human rights. We stand alongside them.