

MESSAGE

FROM MS. AUDREY AZOULAY, DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF UNESCO
ON THE OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF LIGHT

16 May 2019



“Do not destroy me before my time, for it is sweet to look upon the light.”

In Euripides, *Iphigenia at Aulis*, Iphigenia begs her father, Agamemnon, not to obey goddess Artemis' order to sacrifice her. Of all the reasons for staying alive, for Iphigenia, the most important is the sweet contemplation of light.

Light here symbolizes life, and it is foremost among all other determinations. Light comes first; light allows us to see the world. Its essential nature makes light a central concern for all civilizations.

The importance of light marks the architecture of World Heritage sites: the rose windows of Notre-Dame de Paris or the very structure of Machu Picchu, designed in accordance with the sun's path in the sky.

Light and its treatment are essential elements of the visual and performing arts, literature, and human thought. Beyond the meaningful symbolism of light in works of art, philosophy, or the human sciences, the conception of light, as evinced in such works, has evolved as our scientific understanding has grown.

Light is a natural phenomenon which science has come to understand and learned to use, and it plays an essential role in all the sciences and their applications. From the birth of the universe to the creation of all kinds of new technologies, from X-rays to radio waves, in fields as diverse as medicine, agriculture, energy, optics, and countless others, light has shaped – and continues to shape – our world. By understanding light, we are able to achieve the greatest of scientific and technological progress.

All its natural benefits and its scientific and technological applications make light an essential part of the daily life of our societies; these benefits and applications make light an important issue for the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Particularly crucial are the issues surrounding electrical access to light as a means of improving the standard of living in developing countries, and the issues concerning the optical fibre used to connect the world's citizens through the Internet. The resulting communication networks can lead to more cultural exchanges, more justice, responsibility, and peace.

The International Day of Light shows the importance of light in people's lives, its importance in all areas of life. This day was first observed last year in 87 countries. The International Day of Light is being celebrated for a second time this year, and on the occasion of its celebration, UNESCO affirms its commitment to the international scientific community and its work on this most important subject.

Audrey Azoulay

