

**Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the International Day of Light**

16 May 2022

We are living in times when our entire relationship with the living world needs to be rethought. Yet, be we humans, animals, plants or bacteria, we all rely on one basic principle towards which it is equally vital that we turn our attention – light.

The International Day of Light celebrates the physical, social and artistic uses of light, and aims to promote a better understanding of it.

Without light, our planet would be but a cold and barren place. Indeed, where there is light, there is often an abundance of life.

Yet light represents even more for humanity. Light goes hand in hand with knowledge; it is a lens through which to see and understand the world.

This evening, numerous spectators will be enthralled by the coppery glow of a total lunar eclipse. Meanwhile, over a million kilometres away, the James Webb Space Telescope will be ready to gather images that will serve as a vital contribution to all key areas of astronomy. Woven into each of these two moments is the same need to observe and to understand – a profoundly human need that transcends all differences and borders, as evidenced by the International Centre for Synchrotron Light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME), set up under the auspices of UNESCO. Indeed, this particle accelerator allows researchers from throughout the Middle East and beyond to contribute to human progress by working together to study the properties of light.

Since Einstein, light has also been a metaphysical experience of space and time - the final and ultimate frontier of humankind.

In this respect, and as dynamic as this field of science is, for *Homo sapiens*, light is not only a gateway to and a source of knowledge. It also represents the very heart of the human experience – our emotions, our feelings, and a certain sense of poetry. This is why light is at the forefront of all the arts; while painters have sought to unlock its secrets, craftspeople have endeavoured to harness it through positioning, reflecting and filtering. And when it is not being manoeuvred in these ways, light takes over the role of the artist, casting colour, shadow and pastel tones over our landscapes.

Light is at the very crossroads of all the components of UNESCO's mandate. From making science more open and promoting careers in research, especially for women, to making commitments to education, to cultural diversity and diversity of heritage, and to the free distribution of information, our organization's efforts all share a single vision - a brighter future.

And for us, to unite the common goods that are education, culture, science, information, and – as today is all about it – light is to create a not only brighter, but also more sustainable future.