

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

16 May 2024

We stand at a critical turning point, which requires us to rethink our relationship with the living world. In our considerations it is crucial that we remember that all living creatures – whether humans, animals, plants or bacteria – rely on one basic resource: light.

The International Day of Light celebrates the technological, 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. 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.

The need to observe and to understand is a profoundly human one 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 fundamental structure of matter and various applications in health, environmental monitoring, food quality, energy and archaeology.

Since Einstein, light has also been recognized as 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, our creativity. 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 and shadow over our landscapes.

Light is at the very crossroads of all the components of UNESCO's mandate. From making science and technology more open and promoting careers in research, especially for women, to advancing education, cultural diversity and diversity of heritage, while supporting the free flow of information, our Organization's efforts share a single goal – a brighter future.

And for us, to unite the common goods of education, culture, science, information, and – of course – light, is to create a not only brighter, but also more sustainable future.