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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of Forum to Celebrate the 70th anniversary of UNESCO on
the Contribution of UNESCO Member States of South-East Europe to the
Dissemination and Implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the
Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)**

Sofia (Bulgaria), 12 December 2015

Academician Stefan Vodenitcharov, Chairman of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences,

Professor Stoyan Denchev, Rector of University of Library Studies and Information Technologies,

Distinguished Representatives of the Ministries of Culture, Foreign Affairs, Education and Science of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to join you in Sofia today.

I wish to thank the co-organizers of this timely International Forum on the implementation of the *UNESCO Convention on Intangible Cultural Heritage*.

Let me express my gratitude to the *Regional Centre for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in South-Eastern Europe*, to the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria, to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, to the University of Library Studies and Information Technologies, and to the National Commission of the Republic of Bulgaria for UNESCO.

I can't imagine a more meaningful way to celebrate the 70th anniversary of UNESCO than by renewing our commitment to defending the living heritage of humanity.

I believe this has never been so important.

Living cultural heritage is the way we understand the world and the means by which we shape it

It is our bridge from the past to the future.

It is a wellspring of identity and belonging in a world of change.

It is a foundation of wisdom upon which to build sustainable development for all.

This is UNESCO's position.

Culture is who we are.

Culture is what binds us together, as a society, as a people, as members of a single humanity.

In times when the forces of fragmentation are strong, when culture is under attack, we must never tire in sending this message.

Nowhere is this more clear than in the traditions and practices of our living heritage.

UNESCO Member States of South-East Europe have an incredible cultural wealth to share -- this is also why I launched, a few years ago, the UNESCO initiative *Culture -- A Bridge for Development*, building on culture as a force for dialogue, growth and reconciliation across the region.

This is why I am so pleased to congratulate Member States from South-East Europe for the four new inscriptions on the UNESCO Intangible Heritage list, during the last meeting of the Intangible Heritage Committee, in Namibia:

The Surova folk feast in Pernik region in Bulgaria.

The "Glasoechko, male two-part singing in Dolni Polog", in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Lad's dances in Romania.

The Tinian marble craftsmanship in Greece.

Each of these bears witness to incredible cultural vitality of this region.

I see your discussions over the next two days as a unique opportunity to share best practices, to strengthen policies, to improve recognition of this heritage at the global level – its role in deepening social cohesion, in advancing human dignity and progress.

We have come a long way since the adoption of the Convention in 2003.

Together, UNESCO and Member States have introduced international standards to stimulate and guide efforts.

We have increased international cooperation for the exchange of experience and capacity building.

We have created tools and lists to demonstrate the diversity of this heritage, to mobilize assistance for its safeguarding, to raise awareness about its vulnerability.

Most fundamentally, we have helped to change minds.

We have shaped a new global understanding of heritage, beyond monuments, beyond artefacts, to include living heritage, recognising this as a force of innovation, social transformation and sustainable development.

I think we should call this what it is.

It is ground-breaking.

It is revolutionary.

Together, we have shaped a radically new approach to the protection of the living heritage of heritage, putting communities and peoples first, as custodians and as bearers of cultural expressions.

I believe this same vision is the inspiration of the new *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, agreed by United Nations Member States.

In the words of its Declaration, this is “*an Agenda of the people, by the people and for the people*”.

For the first time, at the global level, culture, cultural heritage and diversity are recognized as drivers and enablers of inclusive and sustainable development.

This reflects the advocacy UNESCO has led, with the champion support of Member States - -and I wish to express special thanks to the Government of Bulgaria here.

This is how we can build more tolerant, more inclusive societies.

This is how we can learn to live together in ever more diverse societies.

This is how we will craft new solutions to eradicate poverty and hunger, to create decent and green jobs in the cultural sector, in arts and crafts, in music and tourism.

This is also how we can tackle the challenges of climate change and natural disasters, building on traditional practices and knowledge, to protect biodiversity and manage natural resources.

Our living heritage holds many answers to the questions we face today.

It is our responsibility to defend it.

It is our duty to make the most of it.

This is especially important now.

We are living in turbulent times, when conflicts remain aflame, when violent extremism is seeking to destroy all forms of cultural diversity.

Never before in recent history have we seen such brutal and systematic attacks against cultural heritage and diversity, used as a tactic of war, for cultural cleansing, to intimidate populations, to disseminate hatred, to weaken the grounds for peace.

Living heritage is on the frontline.

Traditions are targeted.

Music is forbidden.

People are persecuted because of their cultural practices.

Our response must be clear.

We must unite to defend heritage.

We must unite to promote culture as a force for dialogue and mutual understanding, as an asset for resilience, for identity, for renewal.

The *Centre for the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in South-East Europe* was established in Sofia, in this very spirit, within a network of centres of excellence across the region, in Zadar, in Skopje, in Tirana and Cetinje, covering all aspects of cultural heritage.

This is the spirit we must promote everywhere, from this region across the world.

In this spirit, I wish you every success in your endeavours – I am convinced these have been so important.