

**Statement by**

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**“The Role of Culture as an Enabler and Driver  
in the Post-2015 Development Agenda”**

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**In the name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful**

**Mr. President,**

**Madam Chairperson of the Executive Board,**

**Madam Director General,**

**Distinguished Heads of State and Government,**

**Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed a distinct honor and pleasure to participate in this august Forum, and I wish to express my gratitude to the Director General for her gracious invitation.

I am fully cognizant of the difficulty with attempting to provide a precise definition of culture, which is a complex and multidimensional concept. The same difficulty also applies to the concept of sustainable development. Looking at culture as a distinctive system of values, beliefs, traditions, norms, practices, customs, behaviors and manners as well as a compendium of spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group which altogether shape and guide the social destiny of a nation, one can easily arrive at the inevitable nexus with the concept and field of sustainable development, which has been defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development as "Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Culture serves as the constituent element in the social fabric, to promote, enhance and institutionalize social awareness and responsibility, and help produce socially and culturally conscious citizens. Their active and proactive participation in the cycle of social life can and must play a creative role in the processes, whose cumulative outcome and ultimate objective, we call sustainable development. Culture, as understood and espoused even by ancient civilizations, and of course, divine religions, also entails respect for and responsibility towards nature – which has been further enhanced and reinforced in more recent times by the growing awareness of the imperative of the protection of environment, at both individual and collective levels. We have also come to appreciate the positive impact of culture, both tangible and intangible, on the much-cherished, albeit illusive, social cohesion and stability in human society, which has come to be seen as a basic prerequisite for sustainable development.

### **Distinguished Colleagues,**

We all concur that the post-2015 sustainable human development agenda must accord culture the pivotal role it deserves in order to ensure that development will have a humane face. To that end, we need to adopt innovative conducive cultural and culture-based approaches and devise appropriate new creative initiatives.

As stated in the UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2001: "... cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature." The Declaration further goes on to consider culture as "one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence." This assertion accorded cultural diversity as one of the most important policy areas of sustainable development.

And now a word of caution as regards the downside of the discourse on culture, which concerns its abuse or misuse, not as a unifying element between and among different societies and communities, rather as a divisive factor. The rather widespread use of violence and resort to force in different parts of the world in the name or under the guise of culture or cultural differences is a sad fact of our world these days. Erection of artificial boundaries between cultures and undue emphasis on cultural differences have in fact served to raise the walls of suspicion, mistrust, and eventual enmity between different communities and peoples. Politicization of cultural differences, with ulterior motives, is an alarming rising trend. A similar trend, with equally negative repercussions also applies to the realm of science and education. This calls for vigilance on the part of all of us, individually as well as collectively.

In his address to the United Nations General Assembly, President Rouhani proposed to collectively wage a campaign of "World Against Violence and Extremism" (WAVE), and invited all members of the international community to join this WAVE. He also emphasized the imperative of thinking about "Coalition for Enduring Peace" all across the globe, instead of the ineffective "Coalitions for War" in various parts of the world. Emphasis on culture and culture-based approaches to global challenges constitutes the critical central element of this new initiative. Only through "Coalition for Enduring Peace" will we ever be able to overcome violence and extremism, and move toward sustainable development.

History and experience also tell us that only through dialogue, understanding and inclusive cooperation, solutions for common problems can be explored. Collective search for solving common problems of a global nature and at the global level should now embrace, much more than in the past, the contribution of culture, which entails attention to each and every culture and building on their common elements. Inter-cultural dialogue should be pursued in a manner to facilitate and promote cultural rapprochement, which would in turn lead to "Synergy of Cultures". Drawing on the earlier discussion on the nexus between culture and sustainable development, I believe "Synergy of Cultures" can be relied on to that end.

**Mr. President,**

Let me conclude by emphasizing that UNESCO can – and should – play an effective role in promoting the indispensable role of culture in the heart of sustainable development. At a more specific level, the Organization is suitably situated to promote and elevate the status of culture and cultural activities and components in the post-2015 Development Agenda. According to its constitution as well as its historic responsibility, UNESCO, as the house of culture and laboratory of ideas should continue to provide an inclusive environment for exchange of views, dialogue and interaction in its main fields of competence; especially culture, science, education and communication.

Before closing, I have the pleasure of presenting to UNESCO, a magnificent silk carpet entitled “Rapprochement of Cultures,” which has been created for UNESCO on the occasion of the launching of the International Decade for Rapprochement of Cultures by Master Mohammad Jamshidi and his colleagues from Qom in Iran.

I thank you very much, Mr. President.