

DG/2005/162
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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on the occasion of the opening of the meeting of States Parties
to the Second Protocol to the Hague Convention of 1954
for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict

UNESCO, 26 October 2005

Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to open the meeting of States Parties to the Second Protocol to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the first meeting of this kind organized since the adoption of the Second Protocol in 1999.

As you know, the protection and preservation of heritage in all its forms is a main priority for UNESCO. This strong concern exists within the overall framework of our work regarding cultural diversity, which has been given further strength and coherence through the adoption by the 33rd session of the General Conference of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Unfortunately, when conflicts or outbreaks of violence occur, heritage is increasingly targeted as the embodiment of collective memory and as the ‘sign’ of group identity and pride; indeed, cultural diversity itself comes under attack.

The entry into force of the Second Protocol took effect on 9 March 2004, when the required number of 20 States Parties ratifying or acceding to this instrument was reached. Today’s meeting comes at a timely moment when UNESCO’s attention will increasingly shift away from new normative work towards the challenges of implementation.

The Second Protocol is a new supplementary instrument to the Hague Convention. Now it has entered into force, the Second Protocol can contribute to the better protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict in five main ways - first, by having developed further provisions on the safeguarding of and respect for cultural property; second, by having defined a new category of protection (enhanced protection); third, by establishing sanctions for offences against cultural property; fourth, by increasing the material scope of protection in armed conflicts that are non-international in character, which represent the majority of contemporary conflicts; and, fifth, by establishing a specific institutional body to monitor the Protocol’s implementation.

To date, thirty-four States Parties to the Hague Convention have become party to the Protocol and a number of other States, both States party and non-party to the Convention, are studying its provisions with a view to joining it. In this regard, I am pleased to be informed that the United Kingdom has recently undertaken a feasibility study on the ratification of the Hague Convention and accession to its two Protocols.

While the number of thirty-four States Parties is an indicator of real interest and concern on the part of the international community, it is still not sufficient. Sadly, the

mass media provide us every day with examples of the destruction of cultural property in armed conflicts scattered over the globe.

Joining the Second Protocol and then implementing its provisions through national legislation are crucial steps. Such implementation, of course, varies from one State Party to another, depending on national legislation and how it is administered as well as on the system of national defence. It is also important to encourage the exchange of national experience in this field as, when implementing the Second Protocol, States Parties face similar problems and are obliged to find appropriate solutions.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This meeting is entrusted with an important task – to elect, for the first time in the history of the Second Protocol, the Committee for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, an Intergovernmental Committee composed of twelve Members. This Committee will be vested with important powers related to the supervision of the implementation of the 1999 Protocol, the management of enhanced protection and the provision of technical assistance.

I welcome the decision of all the States Parties which submitted their candidatures for election to the Committee. The efficiency of the Committee fully depends on the active involvement and motivation of its Members. The Committee will be facing a number of complex tasks which will require legal and military expertise as well as close cooperation between the Committee Members.

I now declare the meeting open and wish you every success in your deliberations.

Thank you.