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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the 10th UNESCO Summit of Heads of States of the
South-East Europe**

Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2-3 June 2012

Your Excellency, President Izetbegović,

Your Excellencies Heads of State of South East Europe,

Distinguished Ministers, Ambassadors,

Distinguished Representative of the Secretary-General of the Council of Europe,

Distinguished Commissioner Vassiliou of the European Commission,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be in Mostar.

This city is known around the world.

Everywhere I go, I speak of Mostar as a place embodying the power of culture to build bridges between people.

It is a privilege to return here today.

As you know, I am from this region.

History has made this region a crossroads between Europe and the Middle East, between Northern Europe and the Mediterranean.

As many of you, I belong to a generation raised in a divided Europe that was able to draw positive lessons from the past in order to stand together.

Over the past decade, the Heads of State of South East Europe have made an important contribution to this effort, harnessing the power of culture as a tool for peace and dialogue.

We have built cultural corridors across the region.

We have built new bridges between north, south, east and west.

Nine years after the first Summit held in Ohrid in 2003, our conviction has only grown stronger -- and today I am delighted that UNESCO co-organizes this *10th Regional Summit*, held at the gracious invitation of the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, His Excellency Mr. Bakir Izetbegović.

I cannot think of a better place than Mostar to discuss the importance of heritage for cooperation between States and societies.

We remember the destruction of the Stari Most (Old Bridge) and the collapse of its arch into the waters of the Neretva.

But we all also recall the rebuilding and inauguration ceremony, in July 2004, the dances and the music that were rallying signs of reconciliation.

In the year 2000, the Canadian poet, Christopher Levenson wrote about the destruction of the Old Bridge.

Now when so much is gone

that made us human all the world over,

where do we find the heart

to begin again?

The people of South East Europe have found the heart to “begin again” – through hard work, through a determination to overcome common problems.

Families and friends from both sides of the river have found their way back to the bridge, to meet and enjoy the famously beautiful evenings of this city.

Just a few hundred kilometres away from here, Sarajevo is also showing that peaceful dialogue amongst Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish faiths is not an aspiration – it is a *reality* that happens every day.

People of different beliefs and origins have worked together to restore the Ferhadija Mosque in Banja Luka, the Orthodox Cathedral in Mostar and the Franciscan monastery in Plehan.

All of this has deepened mutual knowledge about spiritual traditions and sacred sites.

UNESCO has supported this work and these communities, who have decided to make their diversity a source of strength, a force for peace.

As the Tirana Declaration stated in 2004: “*All faiths convey a message of peace, justice and human solidarity.*” No political leader should allow them to become a pretext for division.

This is a message to us all.

Young people across the world are fighting for human dignity and freedom. They want to build more inclusive societies -- they need effective tools for more inclusive citizenship.

Together, we have come a long way.

We can take pride in what has been achieved.

People of this region have moved from reconciliation and emergency reconstruction to new priorities – to concerns for professional training, cultural exchanges, community involvement, and policy improvement.

We have created a network of four centres of excellence on cultural heritage, which is a unique tool to strengthen national policies, to train professionals, to implement international standards.

I see the exceptionally quick implementation of all UNESCO Conventions in the areas of culture is an eloquent sign of commitment.

More and more countries in the region are joining forces to protect their shared heritage, across borders.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is working on trans-boundary projects to protect the Stecak's – medieval tombstones and the Dinaric Karst, together with Croatia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia.

I have inaugurated in February the Regional Centre on Intangible heritage in Sofia.

Countries are working together to enhance a shared vision of intangible cultural heritage. Croatia and Cyprus are now proposing to join other countries for the safeguarding of the "Mediterranean diet," already inscribed by UNESCO.

Yesterday, you signed the declaration in support of the 2nd Regional Biennale of Contemporary Arts of Konjic. These are very encouraging initiatives.

UNESCO will soon launch a regional capacity-building initiative to enhance the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural objects in South East Europe, a personal priority for me as well.

Many cases of recovery and restitution in this region confirm the existing strong political will to move forward – these cases show also the power of cultural heritage to build mutual trust.

UNESCO is now working on a travelling historical exhibit, entitled *Imagining the Balkans*, to enhance a common vision of shared history across the region.

We hope this will be inaugurated at the National Museum of Slovenia in Ljubljana next Spring.

Last year, in Belgrade, I launched a new global initiative, *Culture: a Bridge to Development*.

UNESCO is planning to organize a first event in Turkey, on the iconic bridge of Edirne.

This event will feature artistic and cultural performances, round-tables, and the staging of public readings.

This will be the first of several events hosted on bridges across South East Europe.

I see this emphasis on bridges as a powerful symbol of unity and mutual understanding.

I wish to thank the Minister of Culture and Tourism of Turkey, who has expressed his strong interest in this Initiative.

We need to provide more space for cultural cooperation, to promote exchanges between culture professionals, city planners, artists, and civil society, to build more inclusive and more creative cities.

The time has come for a global shift in the way we approach culture.

Culture means jobs, revenues, social inclusion and development.

The world today is calling out for a greater focus on the role of culture for sustainable development and social inclusion.

Cultural heritage speaks to the very heart and soul of people. This is our message now that we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention under the topic: the role of local communities and World Heritage.

With the wrong approach, culture can divide. From the right angle, it can unite like nothing else.

South East Europe is a living laboratory of this global endeavour.

This is the perfect place to build effective solutions.

Together with the Council of Europe, the European Commission and other partners, we can make a difference that will be meaningful for the region and also to tackle the challenges of our increasingly connected and globalizing world.

This is the spirit of the draft Declaration for this Summit on *Cultural heritage as a cornerstone to enhance dialogue and understanding among cultures and religions*.

This is UNESCO's commitment -- to play a leading role in this process, with all partners in South East Europe.

Thank you.