



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

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 signature of a statement of support to the Biennale
of Contemporary arts 2013**

Konjic, Bosnia and Herzegovina 2 June 2012

Distinguished Ministers,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

What a privilege it is to be here today!

Here, in front of this monument built during the Cold War as a military bunker, now transformed into an exhibition space, where artists and people can meet and exchange – I believe we all share similar emotions at this moment.

Once an atomic shelter, meant to be impervious to the outside world, this place will become a space for dialogue and openness.

This is a symbol of the power of culture to heal painful memories and to transcend the divisions of war.

You have gathered to sign this Declaration in support of the 2nd *Regional Biennale of Contemporary Arts*, together with Minister Sredoje Nović of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Berislav Šipuš, Deputy Minister Berislav Šipuš of Croatia and State secretary Şenay Başer, of Turkey.

This important event will take place next April, but it is already showing the power of culture to build bridges between people.

Since 2009, UNESCO has been a supporter of this biennale, as a platform for exchange between contemporary artists from South East Europe and beyond.

Last year, the first Biennale was supported by the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Montenegro.

Today, we are all encouraged by the strong support from the Republic of Turkey and the Republic of Croatia.

This initiative is one of the results of the Summits of Head of States of South East Europe. I am pleased the Regional Biennale follows up on last year's Summit Declaration on *Contemporary Art and Reconciliation*.

Over the last decade, these annual meetings have built on the determination of political leaders in South East Europe to harness the power of culture for peace, social cohesion and development.

People in this region know how culture can bring together divided communities and reconcile, even in difficult contexts.

I witnessed this personally, when UNESCO helped rebuild of the Old Mostar Bridge in Bosnia Herzegovina.

To succeed, countries must unite. To succeed, people need strong and vivid initiatives, in which they can participate -- to renew their commitment and deepen it.

This is why I have launched a new UNESCO global initiative, *Culture: a Bridge to Development*, to build cultural bridges between creators, civil society and policy-makers in the region and further afield.

Cultural exchanges and networks are concrete ways to reinforce cultural cooperation, to deepen regional integration.

Above all, they are a way to nurture the confidence of all people, to support their sense of belonging and their convictions in their ability to build more just societies.

This is why we must reach out ever more to the civil society, to artists, intellectuals, teachers, professors and creators. We must encourage truly transnational and cross-borders projects.

Last year, UNESCO supported the *Sarajevo Film Festival*. Earlier this Spring, we organized the 1st UNESCO Regional Forum *Balkan Visions*, with the *Sofia International Film Festival*.

Three non-governmental organizations from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia are benefiting this year from the support of *2005 Convention International Fund for Cultural Diversity* to implement projects relating to the book and film industries.

With this Biennale of Contemporary Art, you are taking a step further, to make this place a hub on the map of contemporary art.

A few days ago, we celebrated the *World Day of Cultural Diversity*.

I see this Biennale as a reflection of this celebration.

Thank you for your commitment.