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UNGA Special Thematic Debate on “Culture and Sustainable Development in the Post-2015 Development Agenda”

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Keynote Speech

by

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President of the General Assembly,
Madame Director-General of UNESCO,
Secretary General of UNWTO,
Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO,
The Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellences,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to join you at this High-Level Special Thematic Debate on “Culture and Sustainable Development in the Post-2015 Development Agenda”, and I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this session in close cooperation with UNESCO.

In the face of many challenges that we are responsible to address today, such as population growth, disasters, regional conflicts, climate change, environmental pollution, literacy, including girls education and persisting poverty, there is an urgent need for new approaches. The approaches that should account for humane progress, and emphasize harmony among people and between humane and nature, equity, well-being and sustainability.

We are glad to see that today, the International Community, in searching and defining these new approaches, has started to acknowledge clearly the role of culture as a system of values, resource of energy and creativity to build sustainable development.

I am grateful, in this regard, to some of the most important policy documents of UN Assembly which have stressed the importance of culture for sustainable development in recent years. Meanwhile, under the administration of Director General Madame Irina Bokova, UNESCO also attaches great importance to the role of culture in promoting the sustainable development, by organizing the relative thematic conferences.

Here, I particularly would like to draw your attention to the International Congress on culture, which was held jointly by UNESCO and Chinese government in Hanzhou last May.

The congress gathered some 500 participants from more than 80 different nationalities, and concluded through the adoption of the “Hangzhou Declaration”, which supports the integration of culture within future policies, strategies and goals to be defined in the framework of the post-2015 agenda.

The “Hangzhou declaration” crystalized the wisdom and best practices of different countries. To be more concrete, this declaration urges the governments to integrate culture within all development policies and programmes; to mobilize culture and mutual understanding to foster peace and reconciliation; to ensure cultural rights for all to promote inclusive social development; to leverage culture for poverty reduction and inclusive economic development; to build on culture for promoting environmental sustainability; to strengthen resilience to disasters and combat climate change through culture; to value, safeguard and transmit culture to future generations and to capitalize on culture to foster innovative and sustainable models of cooperation.

These principles are the one of keys to realize the sustainable development; they enlighten the path of development for post 2015.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are living in an era when diversified cultures are converging and all parts of the world are closely connected. Cultures may come in different colors, and such diversity makes exchanges and mutual learning relevant and valuable; cultures are equal, and such equality makes exchanges and mutual learning possible; cultures are inclusive, and such inclusiveness makes exchanges and mutual learning the motif to move forward.

The omnipotent power of culture is beyond limitations. Only when the consensus regarding sustainable development is reached culturally and the consensus is transformed into actions, can we have an even brighter future.

Hence, we should adhere the principle of seeking for commonalities while reserving differences; we should advance innovation in culture heritage and give a strong push for sustainable development; we should encourage the sharing of cultural achievements and deepen cross-cultural exchanges and jointly build a harmonious world.

I would thus like to conclude that, for development to be truly sustainable, culture needs to be fully integrated. This is the hour to take it on board of the post-2015 development agenda.

I wish great success to this thematic debate.

Thank you.