



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Organización
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para la Educación,
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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the cultural evening at the World
Heritage site of Qutb Minar and the Launch of the UNESCO
Commemorative Medal Programme in India**

New Delhi, 11 November 2009

Madame Chief Minister of Delhi,
Minister of State for Planning,
Secretary for Culture,
Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India,
Managing Director of MMTC-PAMP,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you for this cultural evening, and launch of the UNESCO Commemorative Medal Programme in India. It promises to be the perfect end to a most stimulating one-day visit to this fascinating country.

Allow me first to express my gratitude to the Ministry of Culture and the Archaeological Survey of India for hosting this event here at the World Heritage site of Qutb Minar and its Monuments, whose long history and stunning architecture made a huge impression on me during my first official visit to India in July 2001. Our hosts have spared no efforts to make this evening a memorable one, and I greatly appreciate their gracious hospitality.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate MMTC-PAMP Pvt. Ltd. for generously supporting both the event and the UNESCO Commemorative Medal Programme in India. It should contribute greatly to raising global awareness about world heritage in this country.

Since 1966, UNESCO's Philatelic and Numismatic Programme has issued two series of commemorative medals, one for World Heritage and the other

for anniversaries and historic events. World Heritage Medals were inaugurated in 1974 to commemorate UNESCO's international campaign for the safeguarding of endangered world heritage. Some, like the Nubia and Borobudur campaigns, are among UNESCO's greatest success stories in the preservation and restoration of historic monuments. I trust that the UNESCO Commemorative Medal programme we are initiating today will also help raise awareness about world heritage and generate new sources of financial support for related activities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As many of you know, India was a founding member of UNESCO in 1946. Since then, it has greatly contributed to shaping the Organization's critical reflection in a number of areas, especially education and culture. Earlier today I had the opportunity, in the presence of the Prime Minister, to pay tribute to India's contribution in education. This evening, therefore, I intend to focus on culture.

UNESCO maintains that culture is indispensable to sustainable development – partly because it underpins economic development, but also because it provides meaning and a sense of identity and continuity to the life of all societies. This is particularly important in the current era of rapid change, globalization and mass migration. That is why, as Director-General, I have firmly advocated the protection and promotion of cultural diversity both as a fundamental source of social renewal, and as a resource for national development strategies.

In pursuit of this goal, UNESCO undertakes worldwide activities focusing on advocacy, capacity building and training, channelled through a number of recommended standards and legally binding international Conventions covering the manifold dimensions of culture, principally those of 1954; 1970; 1972; 2001; 2003 and 2005.

India has ratified 5 of the 6 principal Conventions and is very actively engaged in implementing them at home and around the world, particularly those of 1972, 2003 and 2005, through its past or present membership of the intergovernmental Committees. Indeed, the universal value of India's astounding tangible cultural heritage has been recognized through the UNESCO World Heritage List, which currently boasts 27 properties in India. In addition, the Representative List, established by the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible

Cultural Heritage, contains four elements from India: Kutiyattam, Vedic Chanting, Ramlila and Ramman.

Yet, these elements represent just a small fraction of India's cultural wealth. Allow me therefore to take this opportunity to encourage the Government to pursue its efforts to ensure that India's Tentative List of Heritage Sites is fully representative of the diversity of India's cultures. For example, it would be interesting to see more vernacular and rural heritage being put forward, as well as cultural spaces of tribal people, which bear considerable symbolic and spiritual significance without necessarily possessing impressive monuments.

Similarly, we would like to see future nominations to the Representative List of Intangible Heritage reflecting all socio-economic and cultural groups, whose traditions and expressions constitute an essential component of India's cultural landscape. Such nominations will also give more visibility to India's success stories in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage.

By promoting its internal cultural diversity in this way, India would certainly send a strong signal to the international community about the importance of this work and the role of culture in development. I am confident that India will rise to the challenge and assume a leading role in this regard.

In the spirit of our long established partnership, UNESCO, through its Office in New Delhi, stands ready to provide the necessary technical support in the area of heritage conservation, safeguarding and promotion. In this connection, let me briefly mention a few of the joint programmes that we have established to date, such as the Indian Heritage Passport Programme, which aims to develop heritage-based tourism itineraries by narrating the rich history of India, while promoting regional heritage planning; or the Indian Heritage Specialist Guides Programme, designed to improve the quality of tour guides at World Heritage sites and enhance visitors' understanding and appreciation of historic properties. In a similar vein, the Cultural Atlas of India serves as valuable tool for establishing an inventory of existing cultural resources, while the Indian Heritage Cities Network functions as a national platform for cities to share knowledge and expertise on urban heritage conservation.

Before closing, I should like to reiterate my thanks to the organizers and hosts of this event. I wish you all much success in your ongoing activities in the field of culture and look forward to enjoying this evening's performance in your company.

Thank you.