



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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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 Signature & Launch of the Afghanistan's National
Programme for Culture and Creative Industries**

Presidential Palace, Kabul, Afghanistan, 27 May 2016

His Excellency Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan,

Mr Minister of Finance of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mr Hakimi,

Excellency The First Lady, Ms Ghani,

Excellencies Ambassadors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a very special day for UNESCO -- this is a very special moment in our
longstanding cooperation with Afghanistan.

I came here today, with H.E President Ashraf Ghani, to reiterate the absolute
determination of UNESCO to stand by the people of Afghanistan, with all
communities in Afghanistan, in the spirit of the values we share.

The values of dignity, tolerance and development.

The cultural heritage of this country, one of the richest and most inspiring in the world,
bears witness to the strength of these values.

Afghanistan is unique in its location and history, standing at the crossroads of
cultures.

The many threads of Afghan history are woven into the languages, cultures and skills
of all communities living in the country today.

Extremists seek to exploit this diversity as a source of division – we stand together today, to reaffirm it as a wellspring of strength, a force for dialogue, reconciliation and progress.

Over the last decades, we have worked together in this spirit.

We have joined forces in safeguarding the two World Heritage properties in Bamiyan and Jam.

We have cooperated to make the most of its monumental heritage in Balkh, Herat and Ghazni.

We have led archaeological surveys in and around important sites, documenting and safeguarding intangible heritage and the reconstruction of the National Museum in Kabul.

“A nation stays alive when its culture stays alive” says the inscription at the main entrance, and this is the best response to hatred and extremism.

The Bamiyan Cultural Centre project reflects UNESCO’s core belief in the power of cultural institutions to connect communities, to educate citizens, to inspire future generations.

I am confident that this Centre will be the first of many successful cultural centres across the country -- to teach about heritage and human values, to foster a network of creators and innovators.

In the same spirit, a few months ago, I nominated Bamiyan as a *UNESCO Creative City for Craft and Folk Arts*, joining many other cities in UNESCO’s network.

Each of these projects has provided effective platforms for fostering dialogue among communities, for deepening a sense of common purpose.

Each has brought the global community together, led by Korea, Switzerland, Italy, Japan, the World Bank, under the leadership of the Government of Afghanistan, supported by UNESCO, testifying to the power of culture to bring people together.

Today Mr President, we make a step further, with the first-ever strategic, long-term investment and cultural policy for the country.

We launch this innovative new Fund to support a major national effort for culture and creative industries.

This bears witness to the ambition of an entire country to renew the place of culture and the creative economy in its development agenda for the next 30 years -- starting with a 10-year programme of action to unlock the potential of creative industries, traditional crafts, living arts, to create jobs, to improve livelihoods and strengthen the sense of belonging and identity.

This reflects the spirit of the *United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, recognizing the role of culture and cultural diversity for sustainable development.

Culture can open new opportunities for peacebuilding and security, as well as for social, economic and environmental development.

The creative industry is the first sector for youth and women employment.

It is a key industry where Afghanistan can export competitively, in design and publishing, music and cinema, as well as handicrafts, carpet weaving, jewellery making.

This can be one of the most important sources of revenue in your country.

Afghanistan has a long tradition of creativity and this sector has a traditional basis in rural areas, where it has been, after agriculture, the most important economic activity – drawing in some areas 35 percent of the population.

This builds on the traditions of all provinces of Afghanistan, fostering sense of ownership and belonging, which is essential to social cohesion and shared national identity.

The potential is here, and it is vast, but we know also the challenges we face.

In 2003, the hand woven carpet industry generated 45 percent of Afghanistan's exports -- in the past five years, its value has dropped by 95 percent.

Afghanistan suffers from continuous looting and the illicit trafficking of cultural objects, which is depleting the country of its most precious resources.

To succeed, we need to strengthen the capacity of national institutions to educate about the role of culture -- we must foster the skills and competencies needed to make it blossom.

This means training professionals with the skills they need to create world-class quality products.

This means creating cultural hubs, strengthening legal frameworks, for more added value, and there is nobody more aware of this than you are, Mr President, and I was inspired by the fascinating recount you just made of the wealth of Afghan history and heritage.

We need the participation of all countries and donors, ensuring Afghanistan's full ownership and responsibility.

This is not only a cultural issue.

And this is not only about buildings and statues.

This is about values – this is about learning to live together.

This is, ultimately, an issue of citizenship.

Culture makes a people united and strong and proud.

In times of turbulence, in times of constraints, this is our ultimate renewable energy – and we must build on the power of cultural diversity, education and skills to heal, to move forward.

In this spirit, UNESCO is proud to join forces with Afghanistan across all of our mandate, to foster creativity, quality education, freedom of expression and free access to information, to build a more inclusive, more open, more confident and stronger society.

This is the message we send today.

This is our commitment to the Afghan people.

Thank you.