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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 International Scientific Committee UNESCO/Japanese
Funds-in-Trust for Strengthening the Conservation and Management of
Lumbini, the birthplace of Lord Buddha**

Lumbini, Nepal, 19 April 2016

Honourable Bhesh Narayan Dahal, Director-General of the Department of
Archaeology,

Venerable Nigrodha, Vice Chair of the *Lumbini Development Trust*,

Kiyohiko Hamada, First Secretary of the Embassy of Japan in Nepal,

Professor Nishimura,

Professor Coningham,

Chief District Officer of Kapilvastu

Assistant District Officer of Rupandeshi,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the *International Scientific Committee*,

Dear Friends,

I am honoured to be here with you, to open the *International Scientific Committee
for the Conservation and Management of Lumbini*.

Lumbini is the birthplace of Siddharta Gautama, the Buddha – it is the starting point of a spiritual journey that has inspired the world in its quest for tolerance, respect and peace.

The Buddha teaches us it is through inner knowledge that you reach the middle way, and Lumbini is the source of this universal message.

It is a symbol of peace, harmony and reconciliation.

It is a source of enlightenment, to build a new harmony with oneself, with others, with the earth, with future generations, aware of the intimate connection of all beings and things.

This resonates at the heart of UNESCO.

I am deeply moved to be here, in this place of hope and wisdom, almost exactly one year after the first of two earthquakes that destroyed many parts of this country.

I believe we find here a source of courage and dignity for all people of Nepal.

This is the true meaning of all our work to protect and transmit the unique heritage of Lumbini.

And this is why this meeting is so important.

Lumbini has been a World Heritage Site since 1997.

The Greater Lumbini Area is home to more than 130 other Buddhist sites, which bear testimony to a rich spiritual and cultural life since ancient times.

There is no other place in the world to hear so clearly the resounding call for compassion, for unity and for peace that lie at the heart of Buddhist message.

I wish to congratulate the government of Nepal, the *Lumbini Development Trust*, and all the national and international experts, standing side by side together in this spirit.

I extend my most sincere gratitude to the Government of Japan for its generous and committed support.

This spirit of unity has already produced many significant results.

We have achieved the conservation of the three most emblematic monuments of Lumbini, the Marker Stone, the Nativity Sculpture and the Ashoka Pillar.

We have led successful excavations within the Mayadevi Temple, which, for the first time, revealed evidence of structures dating back to the lifetime of Lord Buddha.

We have drafted the Archaeological Risk Map for the Sacred Garden of Lumbini, and a management plan.

The remains of a 1.800 years old palace complex were found just a few weeks ago, at the centre of Tilaurakot.

These are far more than technical and cultural achievements.

All this bears witness to the great resources blessing this land, to the creativity and ingenuity of the people of Nepal, over the millennia until today.

Lumbini is an open book on the spirit of Nepal, the determination to look to the future together, united in solidarity and peace.

This is the spirit we need most today.

We can build on this energy, so future generations of pilgrims and visitors may experience fully this ancient religious and historical landscape.

We can harness the power of this heritage to foster sustainable development, decent jobs and livelihoods for all.

Heritage can be a driver to learn new skills and knowledge, developing new capacities for the whole population.

This is my message today -- there is no need to choose between the conservation of historical remains and the development of Lumbini.

There is no need to choose between the preservation of heritage and the needs of the Buddhist pilgrims.

We can have all of these, if we manage to coordinate in harmony the initiatives being planned in Lumbini by so many actors who care for this place.

This is the role of UNESCO and this *International Scientific Committee*, and we are determined to carry forward this important task, guided by respect for the spirituality of the entire area.

I know this work lies at the heart of UNESCO Chair in Archaeological Ethics and Practice in Cultural Heritage at Durham University, and I wish to express special gratitude to Professor Robin Coningham who is with us today. I vividly recall our first meeting in 2012, when I was so proud to receive from Durham University a *doctor honoris causa*. At the time we had already discussed the role of cultural heritage in recovery, peace and reconciliation. Over the past year, you have contributed your expertise to rescue excavations in the Kathmandu Valley, and it is a privilege to be with you in Lumbini today, on a terrain to which you have devoted your life as an archaeologist.

We will continue to work in partnership, to join together international, national and local stakeholders, including representatives of six Buddhist organizations.

You are all present here today, and I believe this is also a strong tribute to the message of the Buddha.

Here in Lumbini, I pledge to you UNESCO's absolute commitment to support the society of Nepal in recovering, in building back better, united in compassion, harmony and peace.

Thank you