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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 Opening Ceremony of the International Conference

“Magtymguly Pyragy and Universal Human Cultural Values”

Ashgabat, 14 May 2014

His Excellency Mr Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Turkmenistan,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to attend this International Conference on *Magtymguly Pyragy and Universal Human Cultural Values*.

I thank His Excellency Mr Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, President of Turkmenistan, for this initiative and his kind invitation.

I recall well the honour of the visit by His Excellency to UNESCO in Paris, on 2 February 2010, underlining the commitment of Turkmenistan to the values and objectives guiding UNESCO.

This commitment is embodied today in the membership of Turkmenistan of the UNESCO Executive Board, for which I am deeply grateful.

It is a special pleasure to be in Ashgabat on this occasion.

Turkmenistan has always been one of humanity's strategic crossroads.

This is the birth place of great empires.

Nisa was the capital of the Parthian Empire, one of the most influential of the ancient world.

The city of Merv was the capital of the Seljuks Empire in the 11th and the 12th centuries, and it remains a uniquely preserved oasis city of the Silk Road.

The old town of Kunya-Urgench testifies to unique achievements in architecture and craftsmanship, whose influence reached across Iran, Afghanistan, into India.

All three cities are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List for their outstanding universal value.

This land and its people has always interacted with other cultures in the region and across the world, reflecting a rich diversity and including a wealth of natural resources – embodied, for instance, in Turkmenistan's Repetek Biosphere Reserve.

The influence of Turkmenistan includes also Magtymguly Pyragy, whose legacy we have gathered to honour today.

As the Turkmen saying goes:

Magtymguly, Bagtyng guly

(Magtymguly, the bestower of happiness)

Magtymguly is considered the founder of Turkmen poetry and literature.

He was one of the first writers to use Turkmen as a literary language, incorporating with it many Turkmen linguistic features, including the use of the goshuk form of poetry.

This explains the rhythmic beauty of his verses and the ease with which they translate into song.

Magtymguly lived through difficult times for the Turkmen people, times of change as well as discord. This explains the rhythmic beauty of his verses, and the ease with which they translate into song.

Throughout all this, his voice rang out for unity, for harmony, for cooperation between people on the basis of solidarity and shared humanity.

In one of his poems, Magtymguly wrote:

Never speak sharply to a fellow man.

The poor are aided by your courtesy.

In his mind, every woman and man carried the same dignity and deserved the same respect.

His life was characterized by a constant search for knowledge, guided by an insatiable curiosity and respect for others.

He believed in art as a bridge to reach others, a key to unlock the mysteries of life and to share the experience of all humanity.

This is why the artist was considered so important by Magtymguly, carrying special responsibility in society, to strengthen mutual understanding and social cohesion.

In his words:

As a swimmer can swim in the sea,

I, the singer, can unlock all secrets

This thinking echoes with the humanistic spirit that guides UNESCO.

As you know, our Constitution was written in 1945, after the devastation of World War Two, and it opens with the following memorable line:

Since wars begin in the minds of me, it is the minds of men that the defences of peace must be built.

These words reflect the conviction we share that the foundations of peace lie in the human rights and equal dignity of every woman and man, in the ability of every woman and man to aspire and become everything they wish.

Today, at a time of global change, when all societies are undergoing transformation, I believe these humanist values have never been so vital, and this is importance of the legacy of Magtymguly Pyragy.

In this spirit, I wish to end with the lines of his poem, *Everything, Openly*, about the birth of spring in Turkmenistan:

When Nawruz falls, the world takes colour – openly:

Clouds cry aloud, mountains gather haze – openly:

Even the lifeless come to life – breathing openly:

Plants, before unseen, grow up and blossom – openly:

Birds open beaks and sing when summer comes – openly

These words, I believe, speak to the beauty of change, and they express the wonder we all share for the world that nurtures us.

Mr President, I thank you for this initiative.