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Message from Ms Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the ICOMOS International Day for Monuments and Sites

Athens, Greece, 18 April 2013

I am delighted to send warmest greetings to all participants in this celebration of *International Day for Monuments and Sites*, which takes place under UNESCO's patronage.

Allow me to congratulate the *Marianna V. Vardinoyannis Foundation* and the Belgium Embassy in Athens for co-organizing this event. I wish to take this opportunity also to reiterate my appreciation to *UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador Ms Vardinoyannis* for her unwavering commitment to taking forward UNESCO's goals, particularly in the fields of education, the social sciences and culture.

The *International Day for Monuments and Sites* was launched by the International Council on Monuments and Sites, the world's leading non-governmental organization devoted to heritage conservation, and approved by the UNESCO General Conference in 1983. This important annual event seeks to encourage local communities and individuals throughout the world to reflect on the importance of cultural heritage to their lives, identities and communities, and to promote awareness of its diversity and vulnerability as well as the efforts required to protect and conserve it.

It is wonderfully fitting that today's event takes place in the splendid Acropolis Museum, devoted to one of humanity's most influential monuments. Inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1987, the Acropolis is considered the finest architectural and artistic complex bequeathed by Greek antiquity and has become a universal symbol of classical Western civilization – including the Parthenon as UNESCO's logo.

With a total of seventeen World Heritage properties, including such iconic sites as Delphi, Delos and Mount Athos, Greece knows well the far-reaching significance of heritage and its universal value for humanity as a whole.

Beyond the economic benefits generated through tourism, heritage is a force for belonging, identity and connection, for both individuals and societies. In difficult and uncertain times, heritage, and culture more widely, are wellsprings of strength and confidence, providing a sense of continuity, dignity and hope for better times.

We must build on past experience and craft innovative ways to protect and safeguard Greece's rich built heritage as well as its intangible heritage. All of us must become more actively engaged with caring for the shared heritage of humanity, to build more cohesive and sustainable communities today and tomorrow.

This celebration of *International Day for Monuments and Sites* is an excellent opportunity to reaffirm the power of the world's heritage. I thank you again and wish you stimulating and fruitful discussions.

Irina Bokova