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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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Объединенных Наций по
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Francesco Bandarin

UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture

on the occasion of the inauguration of the exhibition

“Erró, Saga of American Comics 1973-1999”

UNESCO, 29 April 2014

Madam the Minister of Industry and Commerce of Iceland,
Excellencies, Ambassadors,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
and last but not least, Erró

On behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, Ms Irina Bokova, I am delighted to welcome you all to UNESCO Headquarters for the inauguration of this exceptional exhibition of over twenty works by the renowned artist Erró, displayed for the first time publically.

Allow me to begin by expressing our appreciation to the Government of Iceland not only for making this exhibition possible but also for its longstanding support to UNESCO's work in its various fields of competence.

It is well known that the fruitful cooperation between UNESCO and Iceland has been further enhanced by Ms Vigdis Finnbogadóttir, President of Iceland from 1980 to 1996 and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador since 1998. I would like to take this opportunity to pay special tribute to this relentless defender of women's rights, linguistic diversity, ecology education and bioethics.

When this ‘House of Culture’ was constructed in the late 1950s, UNESCO commissioned several of the world's leading contemporary artists to embellish its

interior and exterior spaces. Over the ensuing decades, the collection continuously grew, mostly through donations by Member States, but through purchases as well. Today, boasting over 600 works, the UNESCO art collection is the largest in the entire United Nations system.

Thanks to this unique collection, UNESCO Headquarters has become a sort of universal museum, a symbol of the astounding diversity of the artistic creation throughout the world. Our museum boasts works by Picasso, Miró, Arp, Matta , Calder, Chillida, Giacometti , Moore, Tamayo, Tapiès, Soto and Vasarely to name only some of the most famous artists.

For the past six years, we have been pleased to share this little-known collection with the general public during the annual European Night of Museums. I encourage you all to visit us next month on May 17.

And I would now like to turn to the artist we are honouring this evening: Erró. This distinguished artist from Iceland figures prominently in the UNESCO art collection with "Thor's Story", a monumental painting generously donated by the Government of Iceland in 2007. This powerful work, which hangs prominently above one of the entrances to our grand auditorium, was painted in Erró's familiar comic strip style in 1999. It is therefore fitting that the exhibition we are inaugurating this evening is entitled " Erró, Saga of American Comics 1973-1999".

This evening we are inaugurating not only a superb art show but also an entirely new UNESCO exhibition series: "Living Artists from UNESCO's Patrimonial Art Collection". The purpose of this initiative is to pay tribute to the great contemporary artists in our collection while also highlighting the importance UNESCO attaches to creativity and the enrichment that culture -- and art in particular -- brings to our lives. Convinced that culture is one of humanity's most valuable renewable resources, UNESCO works to ensure that it is duly recognized as essential for the sustainable development of all societies.

Dear Erró,

On behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO, I would like to express my gratitude for sharing with us these 23 works never before exhibited.

Your generosity as a human being and an artist, as well as your personal and critical vision of modern societies, continues to inspire us. The impressive body of work you have created over your long career constitutes a sort of contemporary history of our world. Your visionary works cast a critical eye on the excesses and errors committed by humankind. In doing so, they raise fundamental questions about today's societies.

In consideration of your contribution to the arts, I have the honour to award you the UNESCO Picasso Gold Medal.