



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

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

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

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 10th Anniversary of the inscription of the Old
Bridge of Mostar on the World Heritage List**

Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina), 3 July 2015

Excellency Mr Mladen Ivanić, Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Excellencies Mr Dragan Čović and Mr Bakir Izetbegovic, Members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Excellency Mr Denis Zvizdić, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina,

Honourable Mr Ljubo Beslic, Mayor of Mostar,

Excellencies,

Citizens of Mostar and Bosnia and Herzegovina,

It is a great pleasure to be back in Mostar.

This town is very dear to UNESCO.

Mostar is a powerful reminder of the values we share.

It is a strong symbol of what can be done when people stand united.

Mostar is also very close to my heart, personally – and it carries deep meaning for this country, for Europe and the World.

This city incarnates the possibility and the reality for Muslims, Catholics, Jewish and Orthodox to live together in peace.

It embodies the power of culture to build bridges between different communities.

It shows that diversity can be a driving force for development, when it is nurtured by dialogue and mutual respect.

I wholeheartedly support the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and its communities, who are determined to transform their diversity into a source of strength, into a force for peace.

In these turbulent times, when cultural diversity is under attack in too many countries, when cultural heritage is deliberately destroyed, when individuals are persecuted on religious and cultural grounds, this message has never been so important.

In the face of intolerance and violent extremism, the story of Mostar gives us hope.

It is a light in the darkness, and we must protect and share this light.

We will never forget that fateful day on 9 November 1993, when the Stari Most was destroyed and its arch collapsed into the waters of the River Neretva.

But the memory of this tragic event must never cause us to forget the rebuilding and inauguration ceremony, in July 2004, with the participation of all communities, harnessing the power of culture to consolidate peace.

One year later, in 2005, the Old Bridge Area became the country's first site to be inscribed on the World Heritage List, standing as recognition of the outstanding universal value of its story.

It was recognized as an outstanding example of multi-cultural urban development and as a symbol of reconciliation and international co-operation.

Mostar, indeed, is more than a beautiful urban landscape.

It has set a precedent in peace-building strategies, in the way we think about peace and reconciliation today, in how we can mobilize our shared heritage to foster social cohesion, inclusion, ownership, citizenship, participation.

It has played a major part in the building of a common identity and it has deepened mutual knowledge and respect for traditions and sacred sites.

Looking back at the past decade, we can see Mostar was a starting point — more and more countries in the region are joining forces to protect their shared heritage, across borders.

Bosnia and Herzegovina have recently finalized trans-boundary projects to protect the Stecaks, medieval tombstones, together with Croatia, Montenegro and Serbia.

There are other similar initiatives, and we must build on this momentum, because much remains to be done.

This is why I launched in 2011 the global initiative “Culture: a Bridge to Development,” inspired by our work here in Mostar, to mobilize creativity and heritage as a force for development, and to create more spaces for cultural cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As events in Iraq, in Syria, in Libya, in Yemen demonstrate, cultural heritage is often targeted to fuel hostilities and spread hatred.

We know we cannot defeat extremism and hatred by weapons only – although they are important.

We know that words and explanations about values, about human rights, may be weak in comparison to powerful images of propaganda — although they are essential.

What we need is to highlight tangible evidences of dialogue among cultures, immediate and solid proof showing that peace is not only possible, it is a reality.

This is the power of Mostar.

As we speak, building also on this experience, UNESCO is completing the reconstruction of 14 mausoleums in Timbuktu, which were destroyed three years ago.

This is our best answer to extremism.

In this spirit, I would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank the Mostar Peace Centre -- I am deeply moved to be designated 2015 laureate of the prestigious Mostar Peace Connection Award.

It is a great honour to become the first woman to receive this award, to join the company of such luminaries as Nelson Mandela, Vaclav Havel, Alojz Mock and Mohammad El Baradei.

I accept this distinction on behalf of UNESCO, as an appeal to continue working for the values we share, as a call to action for all of us to stand for the protection of culture and human dignity.

This is my commitment.

This is the commitment of UNESCO.

This is the spirit of Mostar.