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Organización
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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 Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition “A Phoenix from the
Ashes”**

UNESCO, 14 June 2016

Excellency Krystyna Zurek, Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Poland to
UNESCO,

Excellency Ambassador Worbs, Chairperson of the Executive Board,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for coming today.

I am honoured to inaugurate this captivating exhibition -- *A Phoenix from the Ashes: The Destruction and Reconstruction of Warsaw 1939-1955* -- organized by the Permanent Delegation of Poland to UNESCO, in cooperation with the *History Meeting House of Warsaw*.

Let me express special thanks to Ambassador Krystyna Zurek for making this event possible.

I am particular emotional about this exhibition and about Poland as I was in Warsaw just last Friday, and I visited the museum of the *Warsaw Uprising*, which was a deeply moving experience and a strong testimony of the will of an entire people to fight against the Nazis, to recover from the ashes of war.

The story of Warsaw is the story of the 20th century.

This is a story of destruction.

It is a story of renewal.

It is the story of war – it is the story of peace, and one that is woven into the wider history of humanity that we all share.

The photographs assembled here chart Warsaw's journey from near-total destruction to recovery and rebirth through meticulous restoration.

A UNESCO World Heritage site since 1980, the historic centre of Warsaw, whose history dates back to the 13th century, saw more than 85 percent of its buildings destroyed during World War II.

In the face of brutal devastation, the people of Warsaw responded not with despair but with determination and hope – launching a painstaking reconstruction process that took almost 40 years to complete, relying upon archival documents, as well as the expertise of local art historians, architects and conservators, to restore the city to its pre-war glory.

This restoration included the recreation of the former urban plan, along with the reconstruction of the Old Town Market, historic townhouses, the city walls, the Royal Castle and important churches and religious buildings.

The result is a city reborn -- indeed, a 'phoenix risen from the ashes.'

The result is also an incredible wealth of Polish know-how in the field of heritage conservation and reconstruction.

Poland today sets the standard for effective, research-based conservation efforts in Europe and beyond, and this carries a very special message as we are approaching the World Heritage Committee,

This invaluable contribution was recognized in 2011, when the Archive of the Warsaw Reconstruction Office, which includes documentation of both post-war damage and the reconstruction process, was inscribed on the *UNESCO Memory of the World Register*.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Sur plus d'un millier de sites inscrits au patrimoine mondial, il y a seulement deux exemples de sites à avoir été inscrit après avoir été reconstruits : le pont de Mostar, en Bosnie-Herzégovine, qui est évidemment un symbole de dialogue, de rapprochement des peuples, et le centre historique de Varsovie.

Ce sont deux exceptions très importantes, qui rappellent avec force l'essence du message de l'UNESCO.

Car ce que nous voulons transmettre et sauvegarder, au-delà des pierres et des bâtiments, ce sont des valeurs qui nous rassemblent dans notre humanité commune.

Varsovie porte ces valeurs d'unité, et incarne la volonté d'un peuple de se relever des décombres et de reprendre vie, en s'appuyant sur le patrimoine.

Varsovie porte la mémoire du peuple de Pologne, et l'histoire des juifs de Pologne tués dans l'Holocauste, et je garde un très puissant souvenir de ma visite, il y a deux ans, au Musée Polin de Varsovie, qui est un appel non seulement à se souvenir et à commémorer, mais plus encore un engagement à transmettre ces valeurs.

C'est un message qui frappe tous les visiteurs qui ont la chance de voir cette ville, et ce message n'a jamais été aussi important, et actuel, il est notre réponse à ceux qui veulent détruire le patrimoine, et les valeurs qu'il porte.

Dans cet esprit, je remercie encore une fois la Maison de l'Histoire de Varsovie et la Délégation permanente de la République de Pologne auprès de l'UNESCO pour cette initiative.

Je vous remercie.