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Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
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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 Lectio Magistralis Honorary Fellowship at the  
University CA' FOSCARI on the Theme "*Fostering Cultural Diversity as a  
shared heritage to build Peace*"**

**Venice, 3 November 2016**

Professor Tiziana Lippiello, Pro-Rector of the Ca' Foscari University,

Dear Professors Luigi Tarca,

Prefetto Cuttaia,

Dear Han Meilin, UNESCO Artist for Peace,

Ambassador Vattani, President of the Venice International University,

Dear Friends,

First of all, allow me to say how much I am honored by this award bestowed to me which I take also as a recognition of UNESCO's work and message.

I am honoured to be here, in the beautiful Ca' Foscari University.

I wish to share a message with you today of support and solidarity with Italy, after the three violent earthquakes that struck at the heart of the country, along with a message on the role of cultural diversity in building peace, in fostering development.

Universities have always played a special role advancing the free flow of ideas, intercultural dialogue and human knowledge.

And I would say UNESCO Chairs, in Italy and throughout the world, are privileged partners in this endeavour.

This is why I am so determined to reach out to students and professors, to universities and schools... to foster a spirit of dialogue and openness... to respond the rise of new forms of intolerance and hatred we see in the world today.

Among all prestigious Venetian Institutions, this University is also a very special place as it was the first institute of higher education in commerce established in Italy.

It bears witness to a longstanding Venetian tradition of linking commerce and culture, business and the arts, guided by the strong conviction business is not only about sharing goods, but about sharing ideas and knowledge...

This has been a feature of Venice throughout history, and I believe this carries important lessons for today, on the need to harness the power of cultural diversity to foster dialogue and sustainable growth, to foster tolerance and economic activity at the same time.

The City of Venice and its lagoon is a UNESCO World Heritage site – one of the jewels of this list I should say.

Everybody knows World Heritage, and most people believe sites are inscribed on the list because they are beautiful and impressive.

And, of course, this is partly true.

But, at a deeper level, these sites are on the list, because they embody what we call “*outstanding universal values*” ... because they tell us something about who we are as a single humanity, about the values and principles we stand for.

Venice grew because it developed trade across the Mediterranean and beyond, including with the Muslim world, and gave birth to unprecedented cultural and intellectual exchanges, from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, at the western end of the silk roads, all the way to China.

Venetian glassmakers became the brightest of Europe, drawing on the techniques of Egyptian and Syrian artisans, integrating their own genius and then teaching craftsmen of the Ottoman era.

The art of the portrait was introduced in Istanbul by Gentile Bellini who was a Venetian master sent by the Doge to paint the Sultan Mehmet II, who conquered Constantinople in 1453.

These intercultural exchanges transformed Venice into a meeting point between East and West, bringing together peoples from all backgrounds, as we see in many paintings by Carpaccio or Bellini.

I like to believe this interest for diversity was in fact an effective method for innovation, and this was sustained by the publishing industry and the flow of knowledge and ideas.

All Europe knows the great legacy of the Italian humanist Aldus Manutius, *Prince of the Press*, who invented the italic type and the paperback pocket editions all could own.

He spread the humanist spirit across the continent, publishing Aristotle, Aristophanes, Sophocles, Herodotus, bequeathing Greek literature as an indivisible heritage of humanity.

This shows the very profound link between cultural diversity and freedom of expression, and how much intercultural exchanges can foster innovation and renewal.

Venice is an example of what can be achieved when all institutions of public policy, publishing, trade and the arts, are headed in the same direction, to bring together the best talents, artists, engineers, and ideas from across the globe.

When you think of Tiziano, Tintoretto, Veronese, and see how much their creative rivalry and mutual influence shaped their works, you understand their genius originates not only in their individual talent, but also in the environment of the city itself.

This is the spirit of Venice.

This is the modernity of Venice.

And this is the spirit we need today more than ever.

We need to renew our trust in the power of diversity to make us stronger, more innovative and creative, to foster dialogue and to create jobs at the same time.

This is an important message when we see violent extremists targeting human lives and attacking cultural diversity...

This is an important message when we hear voices seeking to divide communities, manipulating culture to fuel xenophobia...

In too many countries across the world, we see the rise of doctrines based on withdrawal and rejection.

We see deep displacement and migration crises, the tragic situation of refugees and armed conflicts exploited to whip up hatred of the Other, to stigmatize minorities.

We hear the stereotyping of religions and cultures, pretending different peoples cannot live together and that the world would be a better place if we returned to the golden age when “pure cultures” lived in peace, protected from outside influence, in a past that never existed.

What is at stake today in Venice, when I speak about the history of this city, is much more than celebrating beautiful palazzos and glorious names of the history of Art.

This is about reaffirming very specific human values and rights – this is about renewing with a positive vision of humanity.

The history of Venice holds the keys to this “cultural literacy” – it teaches us how it works, and how we can bring it back.

It calls for mobilizing heritage as a force for creativity, innovation and sustainable development.

This was at the heart of UNESCO’s contribution to the United Nations *Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development*.

This stands at the core of *UNESCO's 2005 Convention for the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions*, and the *1972 Convention for the Protection of World Heritage*.

This idea underpins the *UNESCO 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, recognizing that respect for cultural diversity cannot be delinked from respect for human rights.

This Declaration states that cultural diversity is as important for humanity as biodiversity is for nature.

There is rising global awareness on the need to protect biodiversity, and the *Paris Climate Agreement* is a telling example.

We need a similar commitment to cultural diversity in the world, and this means developing much stronger tools and concepts, to equip young people with capacities to deal with cultural diversity.

We must not tire in repeating the extent to which cultures are enriched by mutual exchange.

We must remember historical facts, and recall how peoples and identities have always mingled, shaping richer, more complex cultures with multiple identities.

We must show no culture has ever prospered in isolation, that diversity is a strength, not a weakness.

We must say tolerance is not naive or passive relativism -- it is a fight for the respect of fundamental rights.

UNESCO World heritage embodies this revolutionary idea, which is a humanistic idea – that people of all cultures and faith can unite around outstanding universal values.

When a World Heritage Site is destroyed anywhere in the world, we all suffer, we are all diminished, even if it is from another region, another period, another culture, another religion.

This helps us realize we all belong to the same family – and it is precisely this idea violent extremists seek to destroy, because they know the power of culture to bring people together.

World Heritage Sites tell us there is no “pure culture” -- in the streets of hundreds of World Heritage sites, from the Silk Roads to the Qhapac Nan, people see how cultures are intertwined.

The city of Venice is one of them, and in the face of this reality, we have a choice to make.

We can try to ignore these interactions, distort our heritage in endless disputes about what belongs to who.

Or we can make another choice – we can decide to unite for heritage, to harness the power of heritage to build peace, and to strengthen the feeling of our shared humanity.

This is the spirit of the campaign #unite4heritage I launched at the University of Bagdad in Irak, with students.

But this does not come by itself.

It needs to be taught in schools and in the media.

It needs to be shared with young people.

I remember when I went to Tunisia, just after the revolution in 2011, to celebrate the World Press Freedom Day and ensure freedom of expression would be embedded in the new constitution.

I visited one school, after a visit to the Bardo Museum, that had been attacked later by extremists.

This is a museum with extraordinary roman mosaics – if you excuse me for saying this on Italian soil, the Bardo museum holds some of the most beautiful roman mosaics in the world...

These young boys and girls were in sixth and seventh grade, and I said they could be proud of their heritage and this museum with such rich Roman, Phoenician, Islamic layers of cultures.

One girl raised her hand and said something I will never forget:

*“Why should I be proud of heritage that does not belong to me, it does not belong to my culture, it does not belong to my religion, it belongs to the Italians, why should I care about preserving this heritage?”*

I told her how much every culture is permeated with others.

I told her maybe her grand-grand-grand-father made this mosaic.

I told her there is no pure culture, there are always influences, different layers – and to understand these connections is to give gives us tools to interact and dialogue with our neighbours.

I came away from this visit with the very deep conviction that we need to strengthen the historical references and intellectual tools we give to young people, to help them deal with diversity.

Here today, I am confident we can do so.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Home to exceptional cultural heritage, Italy has chosen to stand at the forefront of global heritage protection efforts, developing knowledge and best practices in restoration, safeguarding, education, and the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property.

It is thanks to the determination of Italy’s representatives to UNESCO that several important decisions were adopted – including, most significantly, a new Strategy to reinforce our action to protect cultural heritage during armed conflict.

And I wish to thank most specially the Permanent delegate of Italy to UNESCO, Ambassador Vicenza Lomonaca, for her commitment and for taking the initiative and

chairing the “Group of Friends Unite4heritage”, bringing Member States together on this issue.

It is thanks to Italian leadership that all European Ministers of Culture gathered last year at Prime Minister Renzi’s invitation, to strengthen cooperation for the protection of heritage under attack.

The establishment by Italy of a *Task Force of cultural heritage experts* and members of the Italian Carabinieri inscribes itself perfectly in this Strategy, and in the framework of the *Global Coalition Unite4Heritage* that we launched last year.

I was honoured to sign the agreement earlier this year in February with Ministers of Foreign Affairs Gentiloni, as well as the Ministers of Culture, Education and Defense, and this Task Force is already providing inspiration to other countries to lead similar initiatives.

We are exploring all possible ways to strengthen the linkages between peacebuilding operations on behalf of the United Nations, humanitarian emergency responses.

This is the spirit of the agreement I signed with the International Committee for the Red Cross.

This idea underpins the landmark Resolution 2199 of the United Nations Security Council on the financing of terrorism, which bans trade in cultural goods illicitly trafficked from Syria.

We have created a wide platform, working with all key partners, like ICOMOS, ICCROM, World Customs Organization, the United Nations Office against Drugs and Crime, INTERPOL and UNIDROIT.

We have launched new training programmes for judges and prosecutors, and we support also the work of the International Criminal Court to end impunity for the destruction of heritage as war crimes, as we have seen most recently in the Timbuktu case.



We are working with customs authorities, and such central partners as the European Union, to harmonize import controls.

UNESCO supports the training of armed forces, and more and more peacekeeping troops are undergoing specific training.

This was the case with the Blue Helmets in Mali.

This is the case with the French military.

And let me emphasize the particular role of the Italian Carabinieri here, who have always made a stellar contribution in this endeavour, and I believe we could do even more to train soldiers – for instance with the *Francesco Morosini Naval Military School* here in Venice.

We do all this, with Italian forces, because we know the protection of heritage is not only about saving old stones.

It is about values.

Violent extremists are targeting all symbols and institutions of creativity and free thinking – monuments are bombed, schools are destroyed, universities are attacked, journalists are beheaded...

I am convinced extremists destroy heritage because they are afraid of history – they are afraid of the narrative it incarnates.

Heritage delegitimizes them, because it embodies a message of dialogue and tolerance they abhor.

Palmyra, like Venice, was a city of merchants and intercultural exchanges, a crossroads of caravans sharing goods and ideas from Europe and Asia.

The disappearance of such sites affects people in their core identity and their resilience – it accelerates the disintegration of societies.

And this is why the destruction of heritage is inseparable from the persecution of people.

In January, UNESCO confirmed the destruction of the Monastery of Deir Mar Elia in Mosul, the oldest Christian monastery in Iraq.

Following this destruction, Father Paul Thabit Habib from Erbil said: *"We see this as an attempt to expel us from Iraq."*

We know Iraq's Christian population has dropped from 1.3 million in 2000 to 300,000 today.

Violent extremists target not only Christians, but also Muslims, Yazidis, Shabaks, Turkmens...

Violent extremists do not choose between culture and people – they attack both – as part of a strategy which I call "cultural cleansing".

In response, we must consider the protection of cultural heritage as a humanitarian and security imperative.

When the fabric of human society is under attack from forces that deny the existence of a shared heritage, we need to hold out a different and positive vision and a sense of kinship with one another, as part of a single, global community.

This is a battle of ideas, this is a global struggle for the hearts and minds, a battle we cannot win with "hard power" only.

And this is the core mandate of UNESCO, bringing together education, culture, the sciences, communication and information, to help people engage in dialogue with one another.

Heritage has special power to bring people together.

And once again the history of Venice is a telling example.

Fifty years ago, historical devastating floods struck Venice.

A few weeks later, on 2 December 1966, UNESCO Director-General Mr René Maheu launched an appeal that led to the *International Campaign for the Safeguarding of Venice*.

This outstanding cooperation experience amounted to hundreds of millions of dollars and allowed the restoration of major monuments within the city, and most importantly, it allowed the inventorying of Venetian heritage, in close collaboration with the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, the Municipality, the Patriarchate and some 50 private committees throughout the world.

The *joint UNESCO-International Private Committees* enabled some 700 restoration and conservation projects, as well as research and capacity-building activities.

A few years later, as a result of the *Venice Report*, published by UNESCO in 1969, the attention of the world was called again on Venice, to extend the safeguarding efforts to the entire Lagoon.

This led to the adoption in 1973 of the *Special Law for Venice*.

As a result of an international round table promoted by UNESCO, the *Venice Lagoon System* project was launched, providing considerable knowledge for the management of the city.

This is UNESCO's contribution to Venice, which also hosts the UNESCO regional bureau for science and culture in Europe.

This is leverage, and it is directly beneficial to all Venetians.

Today, UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee continue to work, in full transparency, in full neutrality, to support the Government of Italy in its efforts to safeguard Venice.

This is not to "lecture" Venice, or to give lessons.

This is not to freeze heritage in the past, as we hear sometimes.

Some people say that UNESCO is “anti-business” or “wishes to stop the development of Venice”.

Nothing is further from the truth.

For more than 20 years, UNESCO has been making the case for the link between culture and development – fostering creative industries and sustainable tourism as a driver of inclusive growth and green jobs.

Together, with Minister Dario Franceschini, at the *World Culture Forum in Florence* in 2014, we showcased the power of culture as a “strategic economic driver,” representing 30 million jobs worldwide, and up to 10% of national GDPs.

We published the *World Creative Economy Report* with UNDP in 2013 and the landmark report on *Re/Shaping cultural policies* last year, to help Member States make the most of creative industries.

Creative industries are one of the fastest growing sectors of the world economy.

World trade of creative goods and services totalled a record \$624 billion in 2011, more than doubling between 2002 and 2011.

And this is why, between 2009 and 2012, UNESCO supported the Municipality of Venice in coordinating the large consultation process to elaborate a Sustainable Management Plan.

This included a workshop in this University Ca’Foscari on *Culture and Development in Venice: From Restoration to Revitalization*.

And this is why I wanted to be here.

A new creative economy is emerging, and we believe Venice has a unique role to play in it, as well as Italy as a cultural superpower.

Venice hosts living traditions, intangible heritage and know-how, from glass making to the ship making, from textile to the Carnival and tourism.

This is about identity, and this is about jobs.

The Biennale and Film Festival of Venice attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors and artists from across the globe, notably from the Global South, showcasing their creativity and modernity.

We can promote these activities in a balanced cultural ecosystem, and this calls for more training, more skills, and long-term investments, to protect the cultural capital of the city.

UNESCO is determined to stand by the people of Venice and support their talent, their passion, their creativity.

This is the spirit of our landmark publication on *Culture: Urban Future*, which was prepared with many partners, including the University IUAV of Venice, *UNESCO Chair on Urban Policies*.

We are all in this together, and the role of UNESCO is to help, with its own tools and mandate, to provide scientific advice, to convene partners, to raise awareness.

We do this because we love Venice, and we care about Venice.

I believe that, in doing so, we can foster both development and peace, sustain the economy and nurture dialogue ...

These go hand in hand, and this is the history of Venice I have tried to highlight, and I wish to thank you once again for this opportunity to convey this message of support and admiration for your City, and express my gratitude to this University for this great honor you give me today. Thank you very much.