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Organización
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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 High-Level Event
of the UN General Assembly on the MDGs
Round Table on Culture for Development**

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased and honoured to be here, side by side with world leaders who have taken full stock of the link between culture and development, our subject this morning.

Let me also warmly welcome everyone in the audience, especially given the unusually early hour!

2010 is a decisive year for the international development paradigm. The economic, social and food crises of recent years, and global challenges such as climate change, have shown that only a holistic approach to development is sustainable.

Shortly after my election as Director-General, Ban Ki-Moon and I discussed UNESCO's responsibility to help Member States harness the power of education, science and culture to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

This means recognizing that the intellectual, social and cultural fabric of societies are key determinants of development. It means that national and international development policies and programmes can no longer neglect the cultural dimension. Let me take a few moments to explain why.

UNESCO's Constitution calls on it to promote and respect the fruitful diversity of the world's cultures. Over the years, and building on seminal works such as the World Commission on Culture and Development chaired by His Excellency Javier Pérez

de Cuéllar, we have advanced a dynamic and inclusive view of culture. This is defined in the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity as: “the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, [...] encompassing in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”.

Yet, in our fast globalizing world, many groups feel that their identity, their language and traditions are threatened.

Almost all states are multi-ethnic, enclosing within their borders a large number of cultures. This is a real wealth for our societies: a springboard for dialogue, social cohesion and development, as last Year’s UNESCO World Report, “Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue” makes clear.

Yet, it is increasingly clear that many development failures stem from an inadequate recognition of cultural and ethnic complexities and lack of consultation with the concerned communities.

We need to harness the power of globalization to stimulate exchange and innovation, as well as the emergence of new forms of creativity. This implies finding ways of helping people to create new and better ways of living and working together.

The power of cultural diversity and dialogue, and the role of shared values in building peace have not been sufficiently recognized in international relations. It is time to pay much more attention to promoting pluralist values in governance.

This is one of the messages of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, 2010 that UNESCO is leading.

Over the past decade, we have seen a welcome new trend evolving, mainly in developing countries. I am speaking about culture as an economic driver: a creator of jobs and revenues; a means of making poverty eradication strategies relevant and more effective at the local level.

I am also speaking about culture’s contribution to environmental sustainability: local cultural practices foster sustainable environmental management skills.

Finally, I am thinking about culture as a lever for international cooperation: culture provides norms and tools for improving aid effectiveness and strengthening national ownership.

While culture is not explicitly referred to in the 8 Millennium Development Goals, the week's Summit provides a unique opportunity to "right the helm" and to vigorously stress the role of culture in attaining the MDGs.

Culture is not simply an asset to be preserved but a precious resource to be promoted. The MDG Summit is a unique opportunity to highlight the crucial role of culture in development, especially in the pursuit of the MDGs. Not as a ninth MDG, but as a distinct element to address through joint programming by all UN organizations and with the involvement of European Union development assistance, bilateral development cooperation agencies, the Bretton Woods institutions and regional development banks.

I hope that this Round Table will trigger the establishment of an international platform fostering strategic partnerships on culture as an integral part of the global sustainable development agenda, as a contribution to the Rio +20 Conference and, perhaps, to a UN Summit on Culture and Development in 2013.

Thank you all very much for your participation.