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Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
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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 on the *Codex  
Suprasliensis***

**Ljubljana, Slovenia, 9 April 2013**

Ms Matela Komel Snoj, Director of the National and University Library

Dear Andreja Rihter, Director of the Forum of Slavic Cultures,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here in the temple of knowledge, temple of reading, temple of history.

This exhibition pays tribute to Slovenia's commitment to safeguarding and promoting humanity's shared documentary heritage.

The *Codex Suprasliensis* is the largest and oldest existing Old Church Slavonic canon text.

The Codex has unique religious significance, bearing testimony to the arrival of Orthodox Christianity among the Slavic peoples.

It has also unparalleled linguistic value, as a key source for studying the origins of the Slavic language.

It has deep cultural and historical meaning, reflecting the ties of kinship between Slavic peoples, between Poland, Russia and Slovenia – these three countries, together, inscribed the Codex on the *UNESCO Memory of the World Register* in 2007 and beyond.

The *Codex Suprasliensis* bears witness to the singular missionary activity of Saints Cyril and Methodius, who introduced Christianity to the Slavs and created the alphabet from which Cyrillic is derived.

We believe the Codex was written in the early 11<sup>th</sup> century by a monk named Retko, in a monastery near Preslav, the old capital of Bulgaria.

It was rediscovered in 1823 by Poland's Professor Michał Bobrowski in the library of the Basilian monastery in Supraśl, near Białystok, Poland.

Presumably, the Codex had been brought there by monks from Athos, Greece.

The Codex was later dispersed, ending up in Slovenia, the Russian Federation and Poland.

Today, there are 118 folios in the National and University Library of Ljubljana, 16 folios in the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, and 151 folios in the National Library in Warsaw.

Thanks to a joint digital edition, we have brought the Codex 'virtually' together and opened it for access to all researchers.

Since its rediscovery, the Codex has been used intensively for linguistic research.

In this respect, its significance is similar to the 6<sup>th</sup> century *Codex Argenteus* (Ulfilas or Silver Bible) for the study of Gothic, old German and modern German languages – also listed on the *Memory of the World Register*.

This is the key objective of UNESCO's Memory of the World Programme – to safeguard and promote humanity's unique documentary heritage, for the benefit of all, for the enjoyment and knowledge of future generations.

We celebrated last year the Programme's 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

We say that heritage at UNESCO has three legs: cultural heritage, intangible heritage and documentary heritage.

For twenty years, UNESCO has worked to stem the disappearance of humanity's recorded memory.

So much of this heritage is lost in the vagaries of time -- through destruction, through neglect, through misfortune.

Our goal is to put fortune on our side.

UNESCO's Constitution calls on us to work for "*the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science.*"

Our vision is clear – the world's documentary heritage belongs to all, it should be preserved for all, protected for all, and accessible to all.

The *Memory of the World Register* includes today some 245 items, stretching from 1700 BC to the present, from clay tablets and films to webpages...

Each embodies the importance of heritage for human identity, for collective knowledge, for cultural diversity.

Each captures the spirit of a particular time for a particular community at a particular place – and, yet, every item plays a part in the universal story of humanity.

This is why we are committed to safeguarding humanity's recorded memory.

We must not stand by as time and the pace of progress erase our common history.

Documentary heritage provides insight to the great diversity of human cultures and to the wealth that still lies hidden in the mists of history.

This is why the *Codex Suprasliensis* is so important.

It opens a window onto a language and cultures at the heart of European history.

This must strengthen our commitment, and it is this commitment we see on display today.

For this, I wish to thank the organisers of this exhibition and the Government of Slovenia.