



United Nations
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Organización
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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

Opening Remarks 40th session of the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO

H.E. Ambassador Michael Worbs

Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO

Istanbul, Turkey

10 July 2016

Your Excellency the Minister of Culture and Tourism of Turkey
Mr Mayor of İstanbul
Madam Director-General of UNESCO
Mr President of the General Conference of UNESCO
Madam Lale Ülker, Chairperson of the 40th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee
Distinguished Members of the World Heritage Committee,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are meeting during an unprecedented moment of extreme violence. Terror attacks during the Holy Month of Ramadan not only in Bangladesh, Irak and Saudi Arabia, but also here at the Istanbul Airport. We are all appalled by these acts of senseless horror. I shared with Ambassador Botsali the sentiments felt by the Members of the Executive Board of UNESCO: such heinous acts of cowardice are regrettable reminders that the mission of UNESCO is even more relevant in today's ever changing world. It is our collective duty to spare no efforts to fulfill UNESCO's mandate in the pursuit of mutual understanding and to steadfastly uphold the universal values our Organization represents at all times.

Istanbul is an ancient city, whose history spans more than two millennia and has been witness to many of the world's seminal events spanning both the civilizations of the East and the West. Current events, make today's meeting in this vibrant and international metropolis all the more relevant.

As has been said before me, let me express my sincere gratitude to the Turkish authorities for their unflinching efforts to make this meeting happen in a calm atmosphere of safety and security.

Allow me also to say thanks to Madam Lale Ülker, the Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee, for the efforts she has taken to ensure optimal organization of this year's Committee meeting.

I am glad to be with you today, representing the Executive Board of UNESCO to provide you with a message of support and encouragement as you begin your deliberations during this 40th session of the World Heritage Committee.

I would like to recognise the presence, and the importance of the work that Civil Society Organizations do for world heritage. The expertise and dedication to the protection and preservation of world heritage helped to lay the foundations for the 1972 Convention. Today their work remains pertinent. Without their expertise, their eyes and their presence, protection of certain sites would not be impossible. In some cases, it is thanks to their vigilance that the alarm bells are sounded, to help raise awareness of those sites that are in peril.

Over the next ten days the world is watching, and we need the wisdom and experience of each of you as active participants and experts dedicated to the promotion of the world's heritage. And there is such a great number of representatives and high-level experts here today.

Your participation in this annual meeting reconfirms the contemporary and continued relevance and importance of the 1972 Convention and demonstrates in more than a symbolic manner the dedication and commitment of the international community to the conservation and protection of the World's Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Mesdames et Messieurs, nous devrions prendre un moment pour reconnaître cet engagement par les représentants des États parties à la Convention. Vous consacrez votre expertise et vous mettez votre volonté politique en œuvre pour maintenir les principes de la Convention afin de préserver et de sauvegarder ce que nous individuellement en tant qu'États – et collectivement en tant que le Comité du patrimoine mondial – estimant être reconnus comme sites du patrimoine culturel et naturel exceptionnel.

Ce dévouement était évident lors de la 39e session qui a eu lieu dans mon pays l'année dernière. A cette époque, l'Allemagne terminait son mandat en tant que membre du Comité du patrimoine mondial et nous avons été très fiers d'accueillir tout le monde à Bonn au cours de laquelle un certain nombre de questions critiques ont été résolues grâce à des négociations productives.

Je suis convaincu que cette détermination à travailler ensemble de manière constructive formeront les fondations de votre travail ici à Istanbul dans les prochains jours.

Rappelons-nous le préambule de la Convention, qui note que « que le patrimoine culturel et ... naturel sont de plus en plus menacés de destruction non seulement par les causes traditionnelles de dégradation mais encore par l'évolution de la vie sociale et économique qui les aggrave par des phénomènes d'altération ou de destruction encore plus redoutables. » À cet égard, je crois fermement qu'il est de notre devoir de renforcer le rôle de l'UNESCO dans la protection du patrimoine dans les zones de conflit, ainsi que d'assurer la protection et la préservation des sites dans les zones touchées par une catastrophe naturelle.

Dans ce contexte, je rappelle d'ailleurs que le Conseil aura à traiter lors de sa prochaine session d'automne 2016 du Rapport sur l'action de l'UNESCO pour la protection de la culture et la promotion du pluralisme culturel en cas de conflit armé comme suite aux décisions du Conseil exécutif et de la Conférence Générale.

Ladies and Gentlemen, culture – and specifically the creativity that nature and our ancestors bequeath us as common our heritage – has helped to strengthen our identity not only as individuals, but also as members of our communities.

Recognising, sharing and celebrating this common heritage also helps to promote social inclusion and cohesion.

Over the years, culture has increasingly been recognized as a driver of sustainable development, alleviating poverty and ensuring more equitable social, economic and environmental development.

Global Climate Change represents an immediate and real threat to World Heritage too. Recently at UNESCO Headquarters, I addressed a meeting on the impacts that climate change is having on our oceans and the consequent damage that ocean acidification is doing to our underwater cultural heritage. Greater consideration needs to be made to effectively address the negative impact of climate change on all fronts.

The World Heritage Committee is very active in this area. It adopted a Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage Properties in 2007. Furthermore, last year in Bonn, the Committee acknowledged that World Heritage properties are being increasingly affected by Climate Change. The Bonn meeting strongly encouraged all States Parties to participate in the Conference of the Parties (COP21) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change held in France last year. The same is necessary for COP 22, that is expected to take place in Marrakesh, Morocco later this year in November.

Dear Colleagues, as Chairperson of the Executive Board I would like to also underline that, at each of its session, the Board acknowledges the importance of the culture programme in all its aspects, including World Heritage.

However, the financial sustainability of the World Heritage system, and hence of the Convention and the cost of its statutory implementation need to be addressed.

The Board and the Committee will need to work in greater unison with a view to ensuring that Culture received the financing it requires. In this regard, it is vital that innovative solutions be found – both for the sustainability and credibility of World Heritage in the future, because it is certainly one of the most visible of UNESCO's flagship programmes.

I would not like to conclude without having acknowledged commitment expressed by the Minister of Culture to increase the contribution of Turkey to the World Heritage Fund on a voluntary basis. This example should be applauded and followed by others.

On behalf of the Executive Board of UNESCO, I wish you a very successful and fruitful 40th session of the World Heritage Committee.

Thank you for your attention