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Organisation
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Culture: Key to Sustainable Development

The Hangzhou International Congress

Hangzhou, China, 14-17 May 2013

Closing Speech

by

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President of the General Conference

Mr. Hao Ping, President of the Congress,
Vice-Minister of Education of China, representative of China
to UNESCO Executive Board

Mr Zhang Jianting, Deputy Mayor of Hangzhou

Mr Francesco Bandarin,
Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO

Mr Hans D'Orville,
Assistant Director General for Strategic Planning of UNESCO

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguished participants of the Congress,

We have been here only four days and we have learned so much from each other, from our hosts, and we all have been enriched and enlightened in a way. We have experienced and practiced intercultural dialogue with each other, with the participants, organizers, and volunteers. We became close to the tangible and intangible treasures of this culture – I learned yesterday from one of the panelists a beautiful indigenous Australian word, PAPAHO, which means treasure box. We have all opened our own PAPAHO and shared it with each other.

It was very appropriate that Hangzhou, China hosted the first forum to discuss the role of culture in sustainable development at the level of the United Nations – this is a place where the ancient Chinese culture, made even richer by its historical tolerance towards other cultures and religions, contrasts with the rapid economic development that is fundamentally altering the physical, as well as cultural landscape of the region.

In China culture is firmly rooted in the identity, and in the spiritual and intellectual aspirations of people, giving meaning to their common past and their shared future. Here, we see most vividly the indispensable nature of culture in fostering economic development, improving the quality of life and security of the people, and ushering societies to evolve along a sustainable path.

During the Congress, we were given clear examples of culture as a vector towards fostering social cohesion, tolerance, dialogue, reconciliation, and, ultimately, lasting peace.

As my dear friend Stephen Cole said: Culture can be a real catalyst of peace making and peace building. But he also quoted President Obama: Culture is the source of conflict resolution but also the source of conflict. So, it has to be taken seriously.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I think all of us agree that the post 2015 development agenda must have culture as one of the basic pillars, because it is culture that nurtures those values that we, as human beings, need in order to give economic development a human face.

Driven by greed and rapacious materialism, which leaves less and less space for thinking with soul and heart, we have exhausted natural resources and destabilized ecological balance. Here, the need for value-based approach based on respecting nature and acknowledging our indivisibility from it is all too apparent. These values are found in all cultural and artistic traditions around the world.

The unequal distribution of the benefits of globalization and scientific progress continues to widen the social and economic divisions, depriving millions of people of their dignity, and leading to tensions and violence around the globe. Often, global inequalities are perpetuated not only by the economic circumstances, but largely from the absence of ethical approach grounded in culture – ethical thinking and ethical action, in the leading global financial systems and institution – the banks, the funds and even the governments. It is therefore evident that any attempt to address inequalities on a global scale must involve a strong cultural component.

Culture is like a PAPAHO: a treasury box, full of unsuspected jewels. Culture diversity for me is a source of inspiration and not a burden. And without understanding each other's cultures we always remain illiterate from each other. This conference translates this into: Diversity in Harmony.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

However, the role of culture in development is a relatively new concept, and needs a deeper understanding through international reflection and analysis of the policies and practices in that area. This Congress, organized by UNESCO, will certainly be an important step towards that end.

Honorable Ministers, Ambassadors,

But we all have to build the case for the after 2015 agenda. We all are convinced that culture to the heart, or in the heart of sustainable developments, we diplomats have to push it, support it in New York through our governments and delegations in the UN.

Dear Friends,

I was delighted to hear in March of this year about the designation of the conceptual and multifaceted composer and conductor Tan Dun as UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador, “in recognition of his efforts to promote inter cultural dialogue through music, consciousness of the scarcity of natural resources such as water, and the diversity of languages, as well as for his dedication to the ideals and aims of the Organization.” Tan Dun is known for his creative repertoire that spans the boundaries of classical music, multimedia performance, and Eastern and Western traditions. Today, more than ever, we need artists such as Tan Dun to promote the cultural aspect of globalization.

I would like to commend again UNESCO’s Secretariat, the Director-General, and the Assistant Director-General for Culture, for putting together, first time since the Stockholm Conference in 1998, such a high level Congress, bringing together the global community and the major international development stakeholders to shine the light on culture and sustainable development.

And a special thank you for China’s National Commission for UNESCO and His Excellency, China’s Ambassador to UNESCO. I’m here with my fellow Ambassadors friends, from Macedonia, United Arab Emirates, Nicaragua, Cote d’Ivoire, Slovakia, Iran, Peru, as well as the Chair of UNESCO Executive Board!

Thank you for the invitation!

I would also like to thank the government of China for hosting this important event, and for doing outmost in order to ensure successful meetings, constructive debates, and fruitful conclusion of the Congress.

Let us continue to work together to promote culture as an essential investment in humanity’s future.

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