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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Federico Mayor

Director-General of the
United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(Unesco)

on the occasion of the inauguration of the
National Museum of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

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Distinguished Guide of the Revolution,
Distinguished Secretaries of the People's Committees,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to take part with you today in this ceremony, which celebrates the completion of a major undertaking: the creation of a museum to enable the Libyan people and its foreign visitors to view the treasures of the cultural and artistic heritage of this country now and in the future. This great National Museum attests to a deep desire to affirm and make known the cultural identity of a people with a history that goes back several millennia.

Here, as in all countries which seek to give expression to all the facets of their personality, especially through the rehabilitation of their historical and artistic heritage, museums seem to be playing an ever more important part in cultural life.

They are no longer regarded solely as venerable institutions which passing tourists feel obliged to visit in order to fix in their memories some fugitive images of the history of the country in which they find themselves. Museums have now been given another much more ambitious mission: to make the people of the country themselves more aware of their own history, the many forms in which its creative genius has been reflected throughout the ages and the distinguishing features of its unique destiny.

Museums, which for so long have been used for conservation purposes only, are now also being used to hand down knowledge - for inter-generational cultural communication.

Thus, many countries, even ones which already have major museums, have been prompted to design, or redesign, museums that will henceforth meet the requirements of this dual mission. The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is one of those countries which have taken this civilizing task to heart.

The construction of its National Museum bears witness to the high quality of the co-operation between the Jamahiriya and Unesco. The Libyan authorities decided not only to allocate all the necessary resources to this museum but also to call on international co-operation and, more particularly, the co-operation of Unesco, one of whose tasks is to help in 'the conservation and protection of ... works of art and monuments of history and science'. Our Organization has been happy to put its skill and experience in this field at the disposal of your country.

Thus Unesco, acting in close co-operation with the Libyan Department of Antiquities, has organized an undertaking one of whose most impressive aspects has undoubtedly been the perfect co-ordination of scientific and technical studies involving researchers and technicians of 17 different nationalities. This is why it is possible today to open to the public a museum which is both firmly committed to the present and resolutely future-oriented.

The contribution of the International Consultative Committee, which I here salute, has ensured that the presentation of the works of art conforms fully with the requirements of modern museology. I am pleased to learn that this museum is one of the very first in the Arab world in which the visitor can appreciate the continuous development of a civilization from pre-history to contemporary times.

The collections exhibited in this museum have been patiently assembled by national researchers who have inventoried and, as necessary, restored and conserved them with the assistance of archaeological institutes in France, Great Britain and Italy. I must pay tribute to the untiring efforts of Dr Abdullah Shaybub in this regard. We must also note the prominence given to the display of works of art and educational commentaries that use highly effective audiovisual means in order to familiarize young people with the successive stages of the development of their country and help the museum to play its vital educational role. This is the role which Ibn Sina (Avicenna) attributed long ago to co-operation, when he said that mutual understanding and knowledge would promote the physical and intellectual development of the individual and humanity as a whole.

Allow me to express on behalf of the international scientific and cultural community my best wishes for the success of this magnificent venture which, I am sure, will be one of the cornerstones of the cultural infrastructure of your country. When a museum is born, not only is a vision of the past preserved but, more important still, a door to the future is opened.