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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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(UNESCO)

at the Inscription Ceremony of the Mir Castle
on the UNESCO World Heritage List

Minsk, 9 July 2002

Mr Deputy-Prime Minister,
Mr Minister of Culture,
Mr Governor,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here at this celebration of the inscription of the Mir Castle on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

The World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe the Mir Castle on the prestigious World Heritage List during its session held in Cairns, Australia, in December 2000. We all know that the Mir Castle, which was attacked many times over the centuries, is a symbol of strength, resistance, power and revival. After a detailed and careful examination of the nomination dossier, the Committee accepted the inscription in accordance with six criteria, two of which are as follows:

Criterion (ii): Mir Castle is an exceptional example of a central European castle, reflecting in its design and layout successive cultural influences (Gothic, Baroque, and Renaissance) that blend harmoniously to create an impressive monument to the history of this region.

Criterion (iv): The region in which Mir Castle stands has a long history of political and cultural confrontation and coalescence, which is graphically represented in the form and appearance of the ensemble.

The UNESCO World Heritage List today comprises 730 sites of which 563 are cultural, 144 are natural and 23 are mixed sites, in 125 States Parties. The Mir Castle now forms part of the UNESCO World Heritage in the company of the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, the Grand Canyon in the USA, the excavations of Pompeii in Italy, the Acropolis of Athens in Greece and the Great Wall of China, to name but a few.

By initiating an elaborate programme of restoration, Belarus has shown that it is very aware of the importance of preserving this site. I hope that the Mir Castle will succeed in enhancing the lives of the people in Belarus and the region, not only by instilling pride in their heritage but also by contributing to the wider purposes of heritage protection.

Let us reflect for a moment on the true meaning of the World Heritage Convention, which celebrates its thirtieth anniversary this year, and why this

Convention is so important for UNESCO, as was stressed at the recent meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Budapest.

As with so many things vital for the life of the Organization, UNESCO's Constitution must be our starting point. Here, reference is made to "assuring the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science ...". What is often forgotten today is how, in the eyes of the Constitution, the protection of world heritage is not an end in itself but a means for achieving other purposes. These other purposes are about advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of people, stimulating the spread of culture, and maintaining, increasing and diffusing knowledge. And these aims in turn are intended to support the achievement of UNESCO's highest purpose: "to contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for [...] human rights and fundamental freedoms..." Therefore, when someone asks why the protection of world heritage is important, reference should be made to these higher purposes.

The World Heritage Convention must be seen in this light. By noting that "the deterioration or disappearance of any item of the cultural and natural heritage constitutes a harmful impoverishment of the heritage of all of the nations of the world", it affirms the equal value of cultural expressions everywhere, the need to recognize and respect cultural identities, and the duty to promote and contribute to the preservation of the natural environment and each other's cultures.

The wider purposes of heritage protection are also evident in the themes chosen by UNESCO to structure the celebration of the United Nations International Year for Cultural Heritage (2002). Those themes are **development**, which draws attention to how cultural and natural heritage can play a significant role in stimulating tourism and local crafts, for example, and **dialogue**, which emphasizes the role that heritage protection can play in bridging inter-cultural differences. Indeed, with the adoption by UNESCO's General Conference in November 2001 of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, questions of world heritage were firmly placed in a broader framework of concern about cultural diversity and how it may be safeguarded and promoted. Article 1 of the Declaration states that "cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature" and goes on to say that cultural diversity is "the common heritage of humanity".

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have come together today to celebrate the inscription of this site on the World Heritage List. You are the custodians of the site. You have taken care of this heritage conscientiously for many years and you are now offering your property to the world. You have shown that you are prepared to share this heritage with the rest of humanity and you have accepted the responsibility under the World Heritage Convention to cherish and preserve it for the benefit of future generations.

It is now your responsibility - as custodians, conservationists and inhabitants of the region in which this World Heritage site is located - to reflect upon and define what this World Heritage designation means to you. This designation will certainly affect the work of managing and preserving the site but, as one of the 730 sites world-wide that make up the diversity of our cultural and natural heritage, it will also influence how the site's significance is interpreted. In this sense, the inscription of the Mir Castle on the World Heritage List is not the end of the process; on the contrary, it is the beginning of a new life, a new meaning and a new responsibility. I am confident that you are ready to undertake this task with professionalism, rigour and a clear awareness of the traditions and cultural significance of the site. And UNESCO is pleased to be able to assist you in any way possible to help you achieve this goal.

It is now my great pleasure and honour to present the Certificate for the inscription of the Mir Castle on the UNESCO World Heritage List. Please accept my warm congratulations.