

DG/2004/012
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
Mr Koichiro Matsuura

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

on the occasion of his official visit to
Tongariro National Park, New Zealand

Tongariro National Park, New Zealand, 1 February 2004

Paramount Chief Mr Tumu Te Heuheu,
Honourable Ministers of Conservation, Education and Defence,
Distinguished members of Ngati Tuwharaetoa and other tribes,
Representatives of Pacific Nations,
Staff of the Department of Conservation,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and privilege to be with you all today. I feel highly honoured, even overwhelmed, with your impressive traditional welcome. I would like to thank you, Mr Tumu Te Heuheu, for your kind words of welcome and let me also express my sincere thanks to you all for your warm hospitality and spiritual sharing.

Tongariro National Park is a special place for you and it is a special place for UNESCO too. It was the first World Heritage cultural landscape ever inscribed on the World Heritage List. Today, we can celebrate together ten years of Tongariro as a World Heritage cultural landscape. This is something to be truly proud of.

The World Heritage Convention now enjoys near-universal membership. A total of 177 countries around the world have become States Parties. The World Heritage List has grown to include 754 properties (582 cultural, 149 natural and 23 mixed properties in 129 States Parties).

New Zealand and Australia are long-standing members of the Convention. We are pleased that, in recent years, most Pacific island countries have joined our World Heritage family. Here in New Zealand, in addition to Tongariro National Park, two other sites have been designated part of the heritage of humankind - Te Wahipounamu - South West New Zealand and the New Zealand Sub-Antarctic Islands.

Tongariro has become a remarkable symbol of the changed perceptions and understanding of heritage. In 1986, the New Zealand Government first proposed Tongariro as both a cultural and natural World Heritage site, calling for international recognition of Tongariro as the spiritual home of the Maori people, as a gift of sacred land and as a place where national park philosophy developed.

However, Tongariro was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1990 only as a natural site. On one level, this is quite understandable. Tongariro is important in the Earth's evolutionary history. The active volcanoes and the ecological sequence of plant communities are of special scientific interest. And there is, of course, the outstanding scenic beauty of this rugged volcanic landscape of "burning mountains".

This initial inscription reflected the difficulty of the international World Heritage community when faced with nominations of sites proposed on the basis of

their spiritual associations. However, a conceptual change and a broader cultural understanding began to develop, accommodating special places showing outstanding ancestral and continuing associations between people and their environment.

In 1992, the World Heritage Committee changed the criteria for selection of World Heritage sites. Greater recognition was given to continuing living traditions and to links between people and place. Categories of World Heritage cultural landscapes were approved by the Committee. In 1993, following a site evaluation by ICOMOS (the International Council of Monuments and Sites), Tongariro was included as the first World Heritage associative cultural landscape.

The cultural landscape listing acknowledged the significance of Tongariro for the Maori people. It paid tribute to the spiritual links between this community and the environment, and recognized that your identity is defined by your associations with the landscape. It celebrated the importance of the gift of this land by your ancestors and the sacredness of the mountain peaks.

Furthermore, the inscription recognized the importance of your co-operative, culturally sensitive management of the cultural and natural heritage. For this reason, this site is an inspiration and model for others in the region and around the world. I am particularly pleased that today we have the participation of the Representatives of the Pacific Nations and that Tongariro will host a visit of traditional leaders from the Federated States of Micronesia later this year. This study tour and cultural exchange will provide new awareness about World Heritage to your neighbours across the ocean.

In the ten years since Tongariro was recognized as a World Heritage cultural landscape, more than 30 additional cultural landscapes have been included on the World Heritage List. Clearly, the example of Tongariro lit the way for others to follow.

In recent years, UNESCO has begun to make great efforts to introduce a new system of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage - the living cultural heritage of peoples around the world. The new Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in October 2003, fills a gap in the system of international cultural heritage protection. Together with programmes for the Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, Living Human Treasures, Endangered Languages and Traditional Music of the World, UNESCO is working to promote, sustain and develop cultural diversity and human creativity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before closing, in my capacity as Director-General of UNESCO and also as one of the former Chairpersons of the World Heritage Committee, I would like to congratulate New Zealand for its recent election to the World Heritage Committee. I am particularly happy to hear that New Zealand will be represented on the Committee by Mr Tumu Te Heuheu, Paramount Chief of Tongariro, who will certainly make constructive contributions to the Committee's work. His presence will be especially useful when the Committee addresses the question of giving greater recognition to the heritage of the Pacific.

In this regard, the Agreement I signed with Prime Minister Helen Clark at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris in April last year is an important platform for action and co-operation. It aims to enhance the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, with particular emphasis on the Pacific sub-region. Both the World Heritage Centre at UNESCO Headquarters and the UNESCO office in Apia, Samoa, stand ready to build stronger bonds of co-operation with New Zealand in this regard. The World Heritage Committee has approved a sub-regional programme for World Heritage in the Pacific. It is our hope that the Agreement with New Zealand and the World Heritage - Pacific 2009 programme will help to engage New Zealand expertise in favour of Pacific heritage conservation.

I would like to see increased representation of Pacific cultural and natural heritage on the World Heritage List in the years to come. We hope that the World Heritage List will be further enriched by the traditions and spirituality of the peoples of this region. Furthermore, we would like to see new models of co-operative management that are grounded in spirituality, tradition and custom. I am sure that this magnificent site of Tongariro will continue to be used as a leading example to the region and the world.

Thank you again for your warm welcome and for your generous hospitality.