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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
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Address by
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Director-General
of the United Nations Educational,
Scientific and Cultural Organization
(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Belarus' membership to
UNESCO and the inauguration of the photographic exhibition entitled "Heritage of
Belarus: Dialogue of Cultures"

UNESCO, 6 May 2004

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome you to UNESCO for the inauguration of this photographic exhibition entitled “ Heritage of Belarus: Dialogue of Cultures”, which has been organized within the framework of the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Belarus’ membership of UNESCO. Let me begin by expressing my gratitude to Mr Vladimir Senko, Ambassador of Belarus in Brussels and to Mr Igor Gubarevich, Chargé d’affaires a.i. of Belarus to UNESCO, for this commendable initiative.

As you know, the promotion of dialogue and understanding among cultures and civilizations has been at the heart of UNESCO’s mission since its establishment in 1946. Major activities undertaken over the years have helped to reveal how much different cultures owe to each other and the historical and contemporary processes that foster a positive understanding between cultures through the discovery of a common heritage and shared values.

The history of Belarus has given rise to an exceptional, concrete example of cultural diversity in the form of a central European castle, the Mir Castle, which reflects in its design and layout successive cultural influences, Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque that blend harmoniously to create an impressive historical monument.

Indeed, the long history of political and cultural exchange and coalescence in Belarus is graphically represented in the form and appearance of the Mir Castle ensemble. The construction of this castle began at the end of the 15th century, in the Gothic style. It was subsequently extended and reconstructed, first in the Renaissance and then in the Baroque style. After nearly a century of abandonment following severe damage during the Napoleonic period, the castle was restored at the end of the 19th century with the addition of a number of other elements and the landscaping of the surrounding area as a park. In its present form, it is graphic testimony to the often turbulent history and cultural diversity of Belarus. The Mir Castle was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2000.

Since time immemorial, the state of Belarus has been at a crossroads of civilizations, cultures and religions. The location of the country demonstrates clearly influences coming from the Baltic, Scandinavian, Celtic and Latin worlds that have left traces of their presence on the land. This can be seen in the country’s toponymy, language, beliefs and especially in the arts. From Celtic standing stones to beautiful churches, nearly all periods of history are represented in the country. Belarus’ multi-ethnic society is also living proof of these historical layers of culture containing Jewish, Polish Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Latvian elements, among others. Although

the main religion in Belarus is Orthodox Christianity, other beliefs are strongly represented on the Belarus soil including Catholic, Protestant, Catholic, Calvinist, Jewish and Muslim. All these trends demonstrate the cultural and spiritual diversity of Belarus. In this regard, it is important to note that the Constitution of Belarus strives to protect all monuments, of every cultural strata, on its territory, as equal parts of the national heritage. Likewise, the Constitution allows all Belarus citizens to enjoy their own languages and beliefs, as well as their cultural and ethnic customs.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential that persons and groups having plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities should live together in harmonious interaction and proper accord.

It is our task to seek policies to promote the integration and participation of all citizens as an earnest of social cohesion, and of the vitality of civil society and peace. Defined in this way, cultural pluralism is the policy offshoot of cultural diversity. Inseparable from a democratic context, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and the flowering of the creative potential that sustains life in society.

Allow me to say in conclusion that I am sure that this photographic exhibition will be an opportunity to discover the new meaning that cultural dialogue has taken on in the context of globalization and the current international political climate, as well as its vital role in maintaining peace and world unity.

Thank you