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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 inauguration of the exhibition  
“Cesis – A Town where the Past Meets the Future”

UNESCO, 28 March 2006

Your Excellency Mrs Helena Demakova, Minister of Culture of Latvia,  
Mr Gints Skenders, Mayor of Cesis,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome all of you to UNESCO. It was very nearly two years ago, Madam Minister, that we met here for the first time and I am very pleased to welcome you back to UNESCO for the inauguration of this exhibition on “Cecis – A Town where the Past Meets the Future”. UNESCO is happy to participate in this year’s official celebrations of the 800th anniversary of the Latvian city of Cesis by hosting this exhibition here at Headquarters.

The ten watercolours on display here nicely illustrate the rich past and unique cultural heritage of Cesis, which city officials are seeking to protect and develop in a sustainable manner. Founded in 1206 at the crossroads of major northern European trade routes, Cesis prospered in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a member of the powerful Hanseatic League. The establishment of a city mint in 1472 bears witness to the prosperity and economic importance of Cesis. In its heyday, the city was renowned for its wealth of medieval buildings, including a fortified castle founded by the Livonian Order in 1206 and the late-thirteenth century St John’s Church, both of which are depicted in the exhibition being inaugurated today.

Despite the hardship resulting from the destructive consequences of successive waves of invasion, the courageous people of Latvia have shown a strong and enduring determination to preserve their culture and national language and transmit them to future generations.

Indeed, the impressive programme of events organized in conjunction with the celebration of the city’s 800th anniversary attests to Latvia’s commitment to preserving its rich heritage – both tangible and intangible.

During my first official visit to Latvia in 2001, I had the opportunity to observe at first hand the work achieved by Latvia in UNESCO’s fields of competence. Since joining UNESCO in 1991, Latvia has actively participated in a wide range of activities in each of those fields. Let me mention just a few noteworthy examples, beginning with education. Latvia is playing an active role in the Education for All initiative for Baltic countries. In January 2002, Latvia hosted the first EFA Baltic Sea conference in Riga and, at last December’s meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania, it became the chair of this initiative’s coordination group for 2006.

Turning to science, in 2001, a UNESCO Chair in Sustainable Coastal Development was established at the University of Latvia. In this connection, I would

also like to acknowledge Latvia's participation in the Baltic Environmental Forum, a programme supported by the European Union.

A key component of Latvian folklore, Dainu skapis, or the Cabinet of Folk Songs, has been placed on UNESCO's Memory of the World Register for the safeguarding of humanity's documentary history. I saw the Dainu skapis during my first official visit to Latvia in 2001 and I remember it well as something very special.

However, it is in the field of culture that Latvia's contribution has been most prominent. In 1997, the historic centre of Riga, which celebrated its 800th anniversary just five years ago, was the first Latvian site to be inscribed on the World Heritage List. In 2005, Latvia joined ten other northern European countries in nominating the Struve Geodetic Arc for inscription on the List. Particularly active in protecting its many vibrant folklore traditions, Latvia collaborated with its Baltic neighbours (Estonia and Lithuania) in nominating a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, namely, the Baltic Song and Dance Celebrations (2003). I was particularly happy to note that Latvia was the eighth Member State and the first European country to ratify the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which, I am very pleased to report, will enter into force in less than one month's time. Finally, mention must be made of the Latvian National Library Project; I am very pleased that the International Commission of Experts set up by UNESCO has now met four times and its work is progressing well.

I believe that these examples, together with the wide-ranging initiatives organized in the framework of celebrating the 800th anniversary of Cēsis, clearly demonstrate Latvia's commitment to the goals championed by UNESCO worldwide. Through its ambitious efforts to preserve its distinctive cultural identity, Latvia is contributing to the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue, both of which are indispensable for the equitable and sustainable development of our world.

I would like to congratulate the organizers of the Cēsis anniversary celebration and wish them much success in the numerous festivities and events to take place this summer throughout Latvia.

Thank you.