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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,  
on the occasion of the inscription ceremony  
of the World Heritage property,  
Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge in Višegrad**

**Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, 25 March 2008**

Your Excellencies Members of the Presidency,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Mr Mayor of Višegrad,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is both an honour and a pleasure to join you today at this ceremony to celebrate the inscription of the Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge in Višegrad on the UNESCO World Heritage List, the second site in Bosnia and Herzegovina to earn this distinction.

I 'discovered' the bridge a long time ago, in the 1950s, back in Japan, when I saw the 1954 film called *The Last Bridge* which describes the resistance movement in the Balkans during the World War II. In the film's famous finale the heroine, a German nurse played by Maria Schell, tries to cross the bridge to get medicine to help her people from the other side. But she collapses in the middle of the bridge without being able to reach the other side. I saw the film 50 years ago, but still recall it very vividly, especially the film's last scene. Thanks to the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, I have the privilege to share the moment when its rightful place as part of the common heritage is being celebrated!

Your Excellencies,

Recognition of the vital importance of shared cultural heritage is a step toward mutual understanding among the people of South-East Europe, and a step towards the sustainable socio-economic development of the communities and countries of the region. I wish to reiterate UNESCO'S commitment to support the efforts of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina to maintain their national integrity and the Government's efforts to strengthen cooperation and dialogue with its neighbours, using its cultural heritage as a tool for the promotion of mutual understanding and development in the region.

In 2005, The Old Bridge Area of the Old City of Mostar became the country's first site to be inscribed on the prestigious World Heritage List. I first visited Mostar in 2002 before the restoration work on the Old Bridge had been completed. Two years later, on 23 July 2004, I was privileged to return to the City, this time for the inauguration of the reconstructed Bridge. I will always carry the memory of that profoundly moving occasion, with the renaissance of the bridge serving as a symbol of international solidarity and reconciliation in a land which had suffered so terribly from conflict in recent years.

This afternoon, I shall pay my third visit to Mostar. I am reassured by the Chairman that the outstanding universal value of the site will be preserved through the efforts of the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Indeed, the key term of the 1972 Convention is the "universal value". The site was inscribed on the World Heritage List in recognition of its universal value. And this needs to be preserved. Therefore the commitment expressed by the Chairman is very assuring.

Today, we have come together to celebrate the inscription on the World Heritage List of another bridge. the Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge.

In the current national and regional context, the symbolism of these two bridges takes on crucial significance, since their histories bear witness to UNESCO's belief in the role of culture, and cultural heritage, in forging reconciliation and building the foundations of peaceful coexistence among diverse communities.

You may be assured that UNESCO stands ready to continue its collaboration with Bosnia and Herzegovina to safeguard the country's rich heritage and to build more "bridges of dialogue". In this regard, we have noted with pleasure that the nomination file for the natural and architectural ensemble of Jajce has been submitted for examination by the 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the World Heritage Committee in 2009. I recall with great pleasure inaugurating with the Member of the Presidency Komsić the exhibition "Jaice, medieval royal city" at UNESCO Headquarters last November.

In 1993, Bosnia and Herzegovina became a State Party to the 1972 World Heritage Convention just one month after joining UNESCO. This important decision bears testimony to the commitment of this country to the protection and conservation of cultural heritage, one of the most tangible aspects of the world's cultural diversity for future generations.

This commitment was reinforced by the prompt succession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to several other UNESCO legal instruments, including the 1954 Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1970 Convention on Illicit Trafficking. UNESCO hopes that it will soon be able to welcome Bosnia and Herzegovina among the States Parties to UNESCO's other Conventions, including the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage and the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, which are important not only for Bosnia and Herzegovina but for the countries for South East Europe as a whole.

UNESCO's long-standing commitment to developing of cooperation between people through intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity is undertaken through a wide range of activities. Since 2003 UNESCO has co-organized the annual regional summit of Heads of State of South-East Europe. It also actively supports the annual Conference of the Ministers of Culture of South-East Europe, whose first session took place in Mostar in July 2004.

Your Excellencies,

At its 31<sup>st</sup> session in Christchurch, New Zealand, last July, the World Heritage Committee recognized the unquestionable outstanding universal value of the Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge. It is an exceptional piece of classical Ottoman

architecture, as well as a remarkable feat of civil engineering. Its symbolic role has been important through the course of history, and particularly in the many conflicts of the 20th century. Its value transcends both national and cultural borders.

I now have the honour, on behalf of UNESCO, to present you with this World Heritage certificate for the Mehmed Paša Sokolović Bridge in Višegrad.

Thank you.