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Organisation
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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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 inauguration
of the exhibition “Authentic Malaysia”**

UNESCO, 7 April 2008

Honourable Minister of Unity, Culture, Arts and Heritage of Malaysia,
Honourable Minister for Education, Chairperson of the Malaysian National
Commission for UNESCO and Malaysia's Representative
to the Executive Board,
Honourable Ambassador of Malaysia to UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to join you today to inaugurate this exhibition celebrating Malaysia's cultural and natural heritage.

I would like to extend a very special welcome to the Honourable Minister for Education, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein. Let me congratulate you on your recent reappointment, and wish you every success in the continuation of your impressive work to develop Malaysia's educational system. Thank you also for having invited me to make my second official visit to your country last month, on the occasion of the 43rd SEAMEO Council Conference in Kuala Lumpur. During that visit, I was very pleased to sign the renewed Memorandum of Understanding between UNESCO and SEAMEO. I am confident that this will help us to further expand cooperation in education, science and culture across South East Asia.

Let me also extend a warm welcome to the Honourable Minister for Unity, Arts, Culture and Heritage, Datuk Mohammed Shafie Apdal. I congratulate you on your important new portfolio and wish you every success in your work to promote and protect the precious tangible and intangible treasures in your care.

Finally, my thanks go to the Permanent Delegation of Malaysia to UNESCO for organizing this worthwhile initiative, which clearly demonstrates the Government of Malaysia's efforts to recognize and preserve the wide range of tangible and intangible expressions making up the great mosaic of Malaysian culture.

UNESCO is delighted to host such events because they underscore our belief that culture can play a key role in promoting sustainable development and mutual understanding. Indeed, that is why we have established the safeguarding of diversity, notably through heritage preservation, as one of our principal strategic objectives.

Malaysia's wonderful natural heritage includes two sites that have been inscribed on UNESCO's prestigious World Heritage List – Gunung Mulu National Park and Kinabalu Park. These tropical preserves are considered outstanding largely because of their high biodiversity, as illustrated by several panels in the exhibition.

On my recent visit to Malaysia, I had the pleasure of touring the historic district of Melaka by trishaw. During that delightful excursion, I was impressed by the extraordinary blend of cultural traditions visible in its religious and vernacular buildings.

Today's exhibition also highlights Malaysia's vibrant living heritage as represented by the traditional costumes, crafts, musical instruments and culinary specialties on display. I should like to express my thanks to the performers who have travelled all the way from Malaysia to be with us. Among the traditions to be enacted in the coming days is Mak Yong, an ancient ritual related to healing practices, which was proclaimed a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2005.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

This exhibition demonstrates the quality, abundance and diversity of Malaysia's wonderful cultural heritage. To ensure the protection of these often-fragile treasures, we strongly encourage all Governments to ratify the other legal instruments in the field of culture elaborated by UNESCO in recent years, in particular the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

In closing, I wish to reiterate my thanks to the Government of Malaysia for its continuing efforts to protect its natural and cultural treasures, and express the hope that it will collaborate closely with local communities and with the international community to ensure that this precious heritage can be enjoyed by generations to come.

Thank you very much for your attention.