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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 “Homo Faber”**

UNESCO, 17 February 2009

Minister of Culture of the Czech Republic,
Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of the Czech Republic to UNESCO,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to UNESCO for the inauguration of this exhibition celebrating the living traditions of the Czech Republic.

As it coincides with the country's Presidency of the Council of the European Union from January until June 2009, let me begin by wishing the Czech authorities and other European Union members much success in their deliberations over the coming months.

Although the challenges resulting from the current global crisis are tremendous, I am confident that under the leadership of the Czech Republic, the EU will address the issues before it with great resolve, intelligence and vision. I was pleased to have had a frank exchange on current events and other areas of mutual interest with representatives of EU member countries during a working luncheon hosted by the Czech Ambassador earlier this month in the wonderful setting of the Musée d'Orsay. We look forward to further strengthening the excellent cooperation that exists between the EU and UNESCO during the Czech presidency.

Allow me to extend a very warm welcome to the Minister of Culture, Mr Václav Jehlička. Sir, I know that the protection and promotion of cultural heritage has long been a personal - as well as a professional - passion. As a former Mayor of Telč, you did much to promote the cultural values of its historic centre, one of twelve

Czech properties inscribed on the World Heritage List. I am confident that under your stewardship the tangible and intangible treasures of the entire country are in excellent hands.

Let me also express my gratitude to the Czech Republic's energetic Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Mr Petr Janyska, and his team for organizing this exhibition. It clearly demonstrates the importance that your Government attaches to safeguarding living traditions and to their role in the sustainable future of our world.

UNESCO is proud of its fruitful cooperation with the Czech Republic, which I had the privilege to visit in February 2000. I should like to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to the Czech authorities for their continued support to UNESCO's programmes and activities.

For example, the Czech Republic has supported the Comenius Medal programme since its creation in 1992. This prestigious programme has allowed us to celebrate the work of over 60 outstanding educators, researchers and initiatives for their work to develop education. And since 1995, some 100 students from developing countries have benefited from fellowships under the UNESCO/Czech Republic Co-Sponsored Fellowships Programme.

In recent years, this generosity has been expanded to include funding for flagship projects, notably in post conflict situations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Kosovo - or post disaster situations within the framework of Tsunami early warning systems.

This evening, we are celebrating the country's rich cultural heritage and creativity.

In addition to its energetic engagement with the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the Republic's commitment to UNESCO's cultural programme was demonstrated through its active participation in the drafting of the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The speedy entry into force of this important legal instrument following its adoption in 2003 reflects the priority the international community places on safeguarding living heritage. I am therefore delighted to inform you that the Ambassador has just presented me with the Instrument of Ratification of the Convention.

Of course, the country's vibrant living heritage is internationally renowned. In 2005, I proclaimed the "Slovácko Verbuňk, Recruit Dances", a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Last November, they were incorporated in the Representative List of Intangible History of Humanity along with the other 89 expressions of the former Masterpiece programme.

This evening's exhibition provides an opportunity to discover the full scope of living traditions practised in the Czech Republic, and to meet some of the practitioners. All of them have received a coveted national crafts award from the Czech Culture Ministry and are part of the country's Living Human Treasure System, established to safeguard such expressions.

In closing, let me reiterate my gratitude to the Government of the Czech Republic for organizing this exhibition and for its commitment to working with UNESCO to safeguard the world's cultural diversity.

Thank you for your attention.