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Organización
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the subject of Culture and Development Auditorium
of the Shaikh Ebrahim bin Muhammad Al-Khalifa Centre
for Culture and Research**

Bahrain, 26 February 2009

Shaikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al-Khalifa, Minister of Culture and Information
Your Excellency Majed Al Noaimi, Minister of Education,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be with you today in the auditorium of the Shaikh Ebrahim bin Muhammad Al-Khalifa Centre for Culture and Research. It is clearly a dynamic place – somewhere for cultural expression and exchange, and a symbol of Bahrain's innovative and forward looking cultural policies.

Let me begin by expressing my sincere and heartfelt thanks to His Majesty the King of Bahrain for his longstanding support for UNESCO in all its dimensions.

I should like in particular to mention the generous donation that led to the establishment of the King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa Prize for the use of information and communication technologies in education and His Majesty's proposal to establish a Regional Centre for such technology in Manama as a Category II Centre – that is centres established by countries under the auspices of UNESCO to help UNESCO deliver its programmes. Both of these initiatives were very wise steps towards the development of what we in UNESCO promote as 'knowledge societies'.

I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important Category II Centres are in delivering UNESCO's ideals and programmes around the world. The Manama centre will contribute to the development of the Gulf region by harnessing the power of information and communication technology for knowledge creation and sharing.

Allow me also to pay tribute to our host, Shaikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al-Khalifa, the Minister of Culture and Information, who has done so much to promote culture in and outside her country. Last June, I had the pleasure of jointly inaugurating with her at UNESCO Headquarters a celebration of the life and work of the Bahraini poet Ebrahim Al-Arayyedh on the centenary of his birth.

More recently, the Government of Bahrain has proposed the creation of another category 2 centre – an Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage. This will be discussed by UNESCO's Executive Board in April this year.

This is fully in keeping with the Kingdom's leading role in the region in promoting the preservation of cultural heritage, notably through the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention. As a member of the World Heritage Committee since 2007, Bahrain has established very good cooperation with UNESCO in the field of World Heritage and has also generously offered to host the 35th session of the Committee in 2011.

The Minister was also instrumental in ensuring that the Kingdom of Bahrain was the first Gulf country to have a site inscribed on the World Heritage List, during the Committee's 29th session in 2005. Indeed, I visited the site – the Qal'at al'Bahrain – Ancient Harbour and Capital of Dilmun on my first visit to the country in April 2002 and encouraged the authorities to promote it as a potential world heritage site. It is a source of pride to me to have been associated with its inscription.

I was therefore very happy to accept Shaikha Mai Al-Khalifa's invitation to share with you some thoughts on a subject at the core of UNESCO's work: the role of culture in development.

Allow me to start with some definitions.

Culture has long been associated with tradition and the arts and for that reason it has sometimes been considered as an obstacle to development.

Fortunately, we now have a more dynamic and inclusive view of culture, defined in the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity as: "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or

a social group, [...] encompassing in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs”.

This concept evolved from a sequence of international deliberations: the 1982 World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico City, the summit of the World Commission on Culture and Development in 1995; and the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development organized by UNESCO in Stockholm in 1998.

In 2002, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, UNESCO succeeded in gaining recognition of culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, alongside the three original pillars: economic development, social development and environmental protection. We also obtained recognition of the role of cultural heritage both in sustainable development and in tackling poverty.

UNESCO's interdisciplinary mandate - covering education, the social and natural sciences, and communication, as well as culture - puts it in a unique position to give substance to this broadened approach to culture.

UNESCO maintains that culture is indispensable to sustainable development – partly because it underpins economic development, but also because it provides meaning and a sense of identity and continuity to the life of all societies. This is particularly important in the current era of rapid change, globalization and mass migration. That is why I advocate the protection and promotion of cultural diversity both as a fundamental source of social renewal, and as a resource for national development strategies.

In pursuit of this goal, UNESCO undertakes worldwide activities focusing on advocacy, capacity building and training. Its Member States have accordingly adopted a number of recommended standards and legally binding international Conventions covering the manifold dimensions of culture.

Principal among these is the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, whose article 3 notes that cultural diversity “widens the range of options open to everyone [and] is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in

terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory, intellectual, moral and spiritual existence.”

Almost thirty years earlier, the 1972 World Heritage Convention committed countries to cooperate in protecting monuments and natural sites, particularly those so important that they form part of the world’s collective heritage – a heritage to be safeguarded for existing and future generations.

More recently, the role of cultural traditions and practices as providers of meaning, continuity and renewal formed the core of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Finally, the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions celebrates cultural goods and services as vehicles of identity, value and meaning.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO’s experiences across the world have proved that no one single model of development fits all needs. Different cultures, in short, require different paths of development. Allow me to provide some examples of how UNESCO approaches this issue.

Our starting point is that cultural heritage and cultural expressions lie at the heart of development.

One of the most visible expressions of a culture is its built heritage, encompassing its cities and monuments. Such places are the source of local and national pride and, when well preserved and managed, can generate funds for the local economy through visitors eager to discover them. UNESCO’s flagship programme for identifying and safeguarding this heritage is the World Heritage Convention which I have already mentioned, but I might add that in this field UNESCO also provides technical assistance and professional training to help the 186 signatory countries integrate the conservation of world heritage sites into regional planning programmes, and to adopt measures to ensure their continuing function in the day to day life of the community.

Here in Bahrain, the inscription of the Archaeological site of Qala't al-Bahrain on the World Heritage List in 2005 stimulated awareness of the country's cultural heritage and the need to safeguard it for future generations.

The Convention also protects natural sites. Indeed, by regarding heritage as both cultural and natural, the Convention reminds us of the way in which people interact with nature and the need to preserve the balance between the two. It is in this spirit that the workshop for the training of regional marine experts aiming at building capacities in marine World Heritage management has been hosted this week by Bahrain.

A community's intangible – or living - heritage is another important source of identity and a resource for development. That is why I made the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage a priority for UNESCO on becoming Director-General, in addition to the traditional focus on tangible heritage

As its name implies, intangible heritage encompasses traditional songs and dances, festivals and customs, handed down orally from generation to generation over centuries and sometimes millennia.

To quote the 2003 Convention, [such] “heritage,is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity”.

In short, it enriches our lives.

The organisation of the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in the United Arab Emirates, in September 2009, demonstrates the commitment of the Arab region to this issue. The Convention, which entered into force on 20 April 2006, now has 108 signatories. It looks set to reach the same levels of adherence at the World Heritage Convention in a very short time. Allow me to express my strong hope that Bahrain will soon join them.

Intangible cultural heritage can also help to preserve the natural environment. Traditional beliefs, intertwined with respect for nature, are a mainspring for the

protection of ecosystems, as exemplified by countless examples of local populations that have been sustainably managing their lands according to tradition – for example through traditional modes of agriculture - for generations. Conversely, global economic pressures have often damaged the environment and also undermined cultural diversity. It is clear that we have much to learn from local and indigenous knowledge.

A third and complementary route to development is via the cultural industries. While discussions about development have often focussed on economic progress, they have frequently overlooked the fact that culture is a social asset – a form of capital. Cultural industries – including publishing, visual and performing arts, cultural tourism, music, cinema and design – have a growing role in the world economy. Today, these industries have a global value of close to 1.3 trillion US Dollars.

The promotion of viable cultural industries in developing countries is therefore particularly important. For this reason, Article 14 of UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions committed signatory countries to work together to foster the emergence of a dynamic cultural sector.

Yet historically, cultural industries have suffered from weak institutional and political support and low levels of entrepreneurial capability. Policy guidance and capacity – development is needed to help transform local talent and creativity into a viable industry – an industry that can fuel economic development and sustain the diversity of cultural expressions.

Cultural tourism – where the special features of local cultures attract the tourist – accounts for 40 per cent of total world tourism revenues. The cultural appeal of a city, region or country depends on well-preserved heritage, alongside a vigorous living culture and the active participation of local communities in cultural life.

In this spirit, the Gulf Countries have recently developed a cultural tourism strategy that is successfully attracting increasing numbers of tourists.

As a result of UNESCO's advocacy, our more holistic approach to culture is increasingly shared. For example, it is now widely accepted that while culture is not directly mentioned in the eight UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted

by the United Nations in 2000, they will not be attained in a sustainable manner without addressing the cultural dimension.

The MDG Achievement Fund established by the Government of Spain in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme – is a striking demonstration of how this is taking root.

A significant part of the fund goes to finance national programmes which demonstrate culture's central role in social and economic development. Eighteen such programmes have been approved, including four in the Arab States – in Morocco, Mauritania, Egypt and the Palestinian Territories.

The range of activities funded – from cultural heritage to cultural industries, cultural tourism and intercultural dialogue – is testimony to the importance of culture in development.

For instance, the programmes in Mauritania and Morocco build upon cultural heritage as a driving force, generating income and employment for local communities through cultural tourism.

And in Mozambique emphasis has been placed on cultural industries, covering issues linked to entrepreneurship, intellectual property rights, creativity and intangible cultural heritage.

My final point is that culture can also reduce social inequalities and discrimination, and build social cohesion.

For example, culturally-sensitive action is necessary to address societal issues such as health care. By way of illustration, action to prevent HIV/AIDS needs to take into account local mores and customs.

Experience has also shown that cultural heritage can play a significant role in building and preserving peace, establishing links between populations and their cultural history. This has certainly been the case in a number of UNESCO pilot initiatives across the world. For example, since 2003 the annual Summits of Heads of State of South East Europe, co-chaired by UNESCO, have succeeded in building

a platform for genuine dialogue by using the region's rich heritage as a basis for effective communication.

Preserving and revitalizing local languages sustains cultural diversity, protects cultural heritage and can also build social cohesion. That is why UNESCO strongly advocates the integration of local languages as well as national and international languages into education systems and all other aspects of public life. Indeed, the importance of languages in development was highlighted by the designation of 2008 as the International Year of Languages, for which UNESCO was lead agency, under the banner "Languages Matter!" In this regard, I wish to pay tribute to the generous donation of Saudi Arabia to increase the presence of the Arabic language in UNESCO.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, development can no longer be defined or measured in terms of economic and technical advances. I therefore maintain that cultural policy must be a key component of development strategies.

In recent years, the world has faced a series of unprecedented crises: in terms of food; inter-ethnic conflict; and now the financial crisis. As we search for solutions, one thing is increasingly clear: the models that guided notions of progress in the twentieth century need to be reassessed. UNESCO believes that cultural diversity has a fundamental role to play in building more sustainable strategies for development and stands ready to work with the international community in doing so.

Thank you for your attention.