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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربيـة 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 official opening
of the International Mugham Festival and concert

Baku, 20 March 2009

Mr President of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
Mrs Aliyeva, First Lady of the Republic of Azerbaijan,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to extend my wholehearted congratulations to the people of Azerbaijan for Novruz. Novruz Bayraminiz Mubarek ["My congratulations on Novruz holiday"].

It is an honour for me to join President Aliyev and First Lady Aliyeva for the official opening ceremony of the International Mugham Festival and concert at the new International Mugham Centre on the happy occasion of Novruz.

Being here today brings back warm memories of my visit in August 2005 when President Aliyev and I, in the presence of Mrs Aliyeva, laid the foundation stone of this centre. I visited the Centre when the construction works were almost completed in May 2008. Today, I am delighted to witness at first hand the culmination of this ambitious cultural project.

Through my numerous visits to Azerbaijan, I have come to learn the extent to which Mr President's and Mrs Aliyeva's commitment to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is shared by the people of Azerbaijan. This morning I had the great pleasure to attend the Novruz celebration together with President Aliyev and First Lady Aliyeva. I tremendously enjoyed traditional songs, dances and appreciated traditional handicrafts.

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President Aliyev,
First Lady Aliyeva,
Ladies and gentlemen,

As you know, in 2003 the Azerbaijani Mugham was proclaimed by UNESCO as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Then, in November of last year, Mugham was incorporated into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in the context of the new UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which came into force in April 2006.

In my view, the new International Mugham Centre expresses a collective desire of all Azerbaijan's people to ensure that present and future generations walk in the footsteps of their ancestors and continue to perform and create the magnificent art of Mugham. The International Mugham Festival that we open here today will be remembered as a milestone in the noble efforts to keep this art form alive.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased that Azerbaijan has proposed additional elements of the country's rich intangible cultural heritage, such as the The Art of Azerbaijani Ashiqs, for inscription on the same list during the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Intangible Heritage in Abu Dhabi, in September 2009.

It is with particular pleasure that I note that Azerbaijan has also proposed the Novruz New Year holiday together with India, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Turkey, and Uzbekistan.

This Representative List represents the public face of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. I am delighted to note that 110 States, including Azerbaijan, have ratified this crucial Convention which seeks to encourage and inspire all countries to establish and deepen dialogue, so that the bearers of the manifold traditions alive today may share their heritage, within and across borders. In this way, the Convention will enable the international community to work together efficiently so that all countries and communities can continue to practice and transmit their living heritage, and in so doing, strengthen the world's cultural diversity.

This is why the International Mugham Centre is so significant. It promises to be a stimulating forum where young and old masters of Mugham can present, explore, transmit and develop their art for the enlightenment and entertainment of the public. I hope it will also become a magnet for masters, students, performers and music lovers from other countries and other performing traditions, within Azerbaijan and beyond.

In closing, let me congratulate all those responsible for creating this centre and wish you all an enjoyable Festival.

Thank you for your attention.