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Объединенных Наций по
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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 opening of the exhibition

“Millennium of Lithuania: Culture and History”

UNESCO, 17 April 2009

Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania,
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Lithuania,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you to UNESCO Headquarters this evening on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition “Millennium of Lithuania: Culture and History” millennium exhibition.

Allow me, first, to take the opportunity to pay special tribute to one of the great figures in the present-day history of Lithuania, President Valdas Adamkus. Elected for the first time in 1998 and re-elected in 2004, he has, among other things, played a decisive role in the integration of Lithuania into Europe.

As UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for the Construction of Knowledge Societies since 2003, it will give me great pleasure to welcome him once again to Headquarters at the forthcoming meeting of Goodwill Ambassadors to be held on 14 May.

I would also like to pay tribute, Minister, to your presence with us here. It is an honour for us that you have come, and it testifies to the importance of this exhibition, which aims to retrace the cultural and political history of Lithuania and the role the country plays in the history of our times.

Lastly, I would like to extend warm greetings to Ambassador Ina Marčiulionytė, who originally inspired this fine initiative. I am of course delighted to see this exhibition

shown here at UNESCO, at the start of a tour of over 15 prestigious cities worldwide.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This exhibition provides me with an ideal opportunity to highlight some aspects of the history and culture of Lithuania that UNESCO has been privileged to celebrate and promote.

I am thinking, for example, of the project entitled “Reaching Across Cultures”, conducted in cooperation with, among others, the National Museum, the Museum of Art and the Library of the University of Lithuania, which traced the lives of notable Lithuanian scientists from the fifteenth century onwards.

I also have in mind the remarkable cross-crafting tradition which is now inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This tradition, the subject of a recent exhibition at UNESCO Headquarters, enshrines not only the crafting of crosses and altars, but also the rituals and symbols associated with them.

These crosses, carved out of oak, are associated with Catholic rites and harvest festivals. They became a symbol of national and religious identity when the country was incorporated into the Orthodox Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. Despite the difficulties of keeping up such a tradition in the twentieth century, it still survives in Lithuania.

It gives me great pleasure that the name of UNESCO is now linked to this fine tradition. I would add that the whole of Lithuania’s cultural heritage is now better known and understood by our Organization.

With no fewer than four sites on the World Heritage List – the Vilnius Historic Centre, the Curonian Spit, the Kernavé Archaeological Site and the Struve Geodetic Arc – Lithuania is one of those nations with a rich and diverse heritage about which we still have much to learn.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude by saying once again to the Lithuanian authorities how pleased we are to welcome this exhibition to Headquarters.

It is most important for Member States to make the general public aware of the wealth and diversity of expressions of national culture and history.

This exhibition will, I am sure, succeed in fulfilling those expectations.

Thank you for your attention.

Koïchiro Matsuura