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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

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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 occasion of the First Asia Pacific Forum-Workshop
“Fostering International Cooperation in Culture and Sustainable
Development”**

UNESCO, 11 June 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to welcome you all to UNESCO Headquarters for this first Asia Pacific Forum-Workshop on the theme “Fostering International Cooperation in Culture and Sustainable Development” - one of UNESCO's top priorities.

Let me begin by expressing my appreciation to the experts based in Asia and the Pacific who have crossed the globe to attend this meeting. I would also like to thank the representatives from agencies such as OECD, ASEAN, JICA and KOIKA for joining us today. Special thanks go to the Paris-based ASPAC group and the Government of Japan for their enthusiastic support for this initiative.

I am confident that this Forum will benefit enormously from the rich exchanges between the diverse participants assembled here.

Over the last five years, the economies of Asia have developed at an average annual growth rate of 8 per cent, prompting some experts to regard the region as the centre of the world's economic growth for the twenty-first century. With the presence of so-called “emerging economies”, the region's development cooperation environment has been rapidly evolving, calling for new forms of dialogue for encouraging innovative development structures and strategies.

However, the region has not been spared the adverse effects of the unprecedented financial and economic crisis currently wreaking havoc around the world.

Concerned by the scale and speed of the recession and its implications for economic and social development, I wrote to participants in the G-20 Summit in London ahead of their meeting on 2 April. In my letter, I reiterated the urgent need to pursue multilateralism and boost investment in the social sectors - including culture - as vital both to spurring a recovery and laying the foundations for more stable and equitable growth in the future.

Allow me to explain why.

For too long, the contribution of culture to development was largely ignored. This was partly because the term 'culture' was for many years defined in fairly narrow, somewhat elitist terms. Under this model, culture was marginalised – seen as something to be enjoyed as a leisure pursuit rather than fundamental to human understanding and interactions. The current definition, expressed in the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, reflects a more inclusive approach, considering culture 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 gatherings: 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 sciences and communication, as well as culture - puts it in a unique position to give substance to this broadened approach to culture in all parts of the world, including Asia and the Pacific.

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. And it is why UNESCO advocates the protection and promotion of cultural diversity both as a fundamental source of social renewal, and as a resource for national development strategies.

To put this into practice, UNESCO undertakes worldwide activities focusing on advocacy, capacity building and training stemming principally from the standard setting instruments developed with and adopted by its Member States. Our work comprises a dynamic mix of global activities that go hand in hand with projects at the country level.

UNESCO's Culture Programme for 2008-2009 has two sectoral priorities: promoting cultural diversity through the safeguarding of heritage in all its dimensions and enhancement of cultural expressions; and promoting social cohesion by fostering pluralism, dialogue among cultures and the establishment of a culture of peace.

Under the first of these priorities, we are working to highlight the role of heritage in ensuring sustainable development and social cohesion through the safeguarding of heritage in all its forms. In this regard, emphasis is placed on five of the legal instruments administered by the Culture Sector, headed by Françoise Rivière, namely, the 1954 Hague Convention and its two protocols dealing with the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict, and the conventions of 1970, 1972, 2001, 2003, dealing with illicit trafficking, World Heritage, underwater and intangible heritage respectively.

In this connection, several category 2 centres have been - or are being - established in Asia and the Pacific. Whether it is the Regional Training Institute for World Heritage based in China, or one of the three interrelated centres on Intangible Cultural Heritage currently under preparation in Japan, China and the Republic of Korea, I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important Category 2 Centres are for delivering our programmes in the region and in mobilizing knowledge and partnerships.

The second priority targets the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions and intercultural dialogue. Action under this priority mainly involves the development of cultural industries and cultural statistics as well as the implementation of two Conventions: the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions and the 1952 Universal Copyright Convention.

To realize this objective, we have reinforced our efforts to integrate culture into national development strategies, notably through joint programming exercises and the development of strategic partnerships. Naturally, our network of field offices plays a crucial role in implementing these projects.

A good example of how we apply this at country level is the Creative Industries Support Programme currently being put in place in Cambodia with funding from the UNDP-Spain MDG Achievement Fund. The project aims to enhance local capacities in cultural preservation, entrepreneurship, and the marketing and trade of creative industries so as to transform national talent into a dynamic industry capable of supporting sustainable development and social cohesion.

In China, we are working with seven other UN agencies on the China Culture and Development Partnership Framework, also funded by the MDG Achievement Fund. The aim is to support good governance of cultural diversity in selected provinces by supporting the culture based economic activities of ethnic minority peoples.

As a result of UNESCO's advocacy and action, 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.

I have already mentioned the MDG Achievement Fund as a striking demonstration of how this is taking root and making a difference at country level. Looking to Asia and the Pacific, Japan has long been a crucial donor for World Heritage, intangible cultural heritage and the promotion of dialogue. The Republic of Korea is now becoming an important donor for these areas as well. Let me also mention the Australian Trust Fund for World Heritage, which is making available up to \$1 million to support the implementation of the World Heritage Convention in the region.

However, we still have some distance to travel before culture is accorded equal priority to education, health or the environment as an area for development cooperation.

The consequence is that cultural resources are particularly vulnerable to the negative fallout of the current crisis. This threatens social cohesion, particularly in Asia and the Pacific, where cultural diversity is at great risk as a result of rapid globalization.

We need to mitigate the impact by more aggressively pursuing international cooperation in this field. It is in this challenging global context that UNESCO has convened today's meeting.

In this connection, I would like to mention a new global initiative being launched this year: the World Culture Forum. The first edition of this annual Forum, generously supported by Italy and the Regional Government of Lombardy, will take place in Monza, Italy, in September. The current crisis has brought to the fore the importance of cultural industries in the global economy. Accordingly, for this first edition, we will bring together leading industry figures, some of the world's foremost artists and designers, as well as the principal political decision makers in these fields to explore the connections between crafts and cultural industries. It is hoped that the outcomes of this meeting will provide inputs to the Monza Forum.

Let me conclude by reiterating that the current crisis has given rise to both challenges and the opportunity to rethink the models that have guided the international community's thinking about development in the past decades.

I am confident that your exchanges today and tomorrow will greatly enrich our collective understanding of existing international cooperation strategies and experiences in culture and development. This is an important step towards building fruitful synergies for bilateral, multilateral and South-South cooperation, and for developing the networks and partnerships that will allow us to rise to the challenges of building a sustainable future for all people of the Asia and Pacific region. I shall therefore be following your deliberations with great interest.

Thank you for your attention.