



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention

Philadelphia, USA, 15 March 2012

Excellency Secretary of the Interior Salazar,

Assistant Secretary Jacobson,

Director Jarvis,

Superintendent MacLeod,

Mr. Jefferson – I'm glad to see you in such a good shape!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am both delighted and moved to address you today in these hallowed halls.

The universal principles of freedom and democracy set forth in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States were signed here.

These texts are fundamentally important to the American people.

They have had a profound impact on people around the world, particularly in my own country, Bulgaria, and other Eastern European democracies that emerged in the 1990s.

I can see no better place than this to understand that healthy societies do not stand merely on economic prosperity and political arrangements, but rather on values and principles.

This conviction is the living soul of the United States and is echoed in the Charter of the United Nations and the Constitution of UNESCO in 1945, where American values are deeply embedded.

More than 30 years later, the United States played again a major role in the development of the *World Heritage Convention*.

Standing here, we understand what UNESCO owes to the United States, and why UNESCO matters for Americans.

This place was the first US cultural site to be inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, in 1979.

The United States was the first country to ratify this Convention, and it has since been able to use the Convention as a channel to share its conservation ideals around the world.

Through the *World Heritage Convention*, the United States have joined forces to protect the most precious places on the planet, leveraging funds and expertise, as a leader in international cooperation.

World heritage status has helped to raise awareness about American sites, starting with the American people.

It has helped managers and curators to raise funds and better negotiate to protect the sites.

We share the same vision that heritage is our bridge from the past to the future.

It is not a luxury -- it is a precious asset.

Heritage is a wellspring of dignity and knowledge, to be shared.

It is a way to foster mutual understanding, as a foundation for peace and security.

It is a powerful force for social and economic development and tourism, worth a several billions of dollars in capital, trade, visits.

All of this requires commitment.

The protection of sites of outstanding universal value is a shared responsibility.

We must protect them together. International cooperation is vital.

UNESCO is the only international organization with a specific mandate for culture and plays a key role.

This year, we celebrate 40 years of campaigns and efforts to protect our great heritage.

Over the last 40 years, the world has changed, but the values and purpose enshrined in the Convention endure.

The United States National Park system is in itself a strong embodiment of such values and purpose.

Here at Independence Hall in Philadelphia, the birthplace of the United States of America, we can see for ourselves the meaning of the concept of 'Outstanding Universal Value' and celebrate its significance.

I see today's meeting as an opportunity not only to celebrate the value of World Heritage but also to better understand its relevance for the future.

I look forward to a rich and fruitful discussion.

Thank you.