



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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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 opening the 41st Session of the World Heritage
Committee**

Krakow, 2 July 2017

His Excellency Mr Andrzej Duda, President of the Republic of Poland,

Excellency Mr Piotr Gliński, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Culture and National Heritage,

Professor Jacek Purchla, Chairman of the World Heritage Committee,

Honourable Jacek Majchrowski, Mayor of the City of Kraków,

Excellency Mr Michael Worbs, President of the UNESCO Executive Board,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the opening of the 41st session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

I wish to thank our Polish hosts for their warm hospitality.

I wish to pay a special tribute to you, Mr President Duda, for your commitment to the protection of heritage. I remember your strong words before the UN General Assembly in 2015, on the occasion of the 70th anniversary, when you denounced the destruction of Palmyra as a war crime, and called upon the international community to join forces with UNESCO to protect heritage as key to build a peaceful future.

This resonates at the heart of UNESCO's mandate.

I wish to thank Deputy Prime Minister Glinski, for the organization of this Committee, in this beautiful Wawel Royal Castle.

I thank all the delegations and thousands of participants who have come to Krakow, to unite for heritage, to show our determination to make heritage a force for peace, for dignity and for sustainable development in what is the world's largest global cultural event.

This is the last session I have the privilege to attend in my capacity of Director-General of UNESCO, and I wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of you, for the long path we have travelled together.

Today, the protection of heritage is fully recognized as a key security issue, which cannot be delinked from the protection of human lives in times of conflict, in case of emergency – this was expressed in two recent and historical decisions of the United Nations Security Council – resolution 2199 adopted in February 2015 and resolution 2347 in March.

These are major political achievements, and they are thanks to you, they are thanks to UNESCO.

Today, the promotion of heritage and cultural diversity is fully recognized as an enabler of sustainable development, a driver for stronger economies and stronger societies, providing decent jobs and a decent future.

This also is a major political achievement, and this was not the case a decade ago – it is thanks to you, it is thanks to UNESCO.

World Heritage is not just a list of marvellous sites – it is a vision for peace, carved in stone and cultural landscapes, with the power to change the minds of women and men, to shape a different future for all.

World Heritage embodies the great humanist idea that people of all cultures and faiths can unite around places of outstanding universal value.

When a World Heritage site is destroyed anywhere in the world, we are all diminished, even if it is from another region, another period, another culture, another religion.

When we visit a World Heritage site anywhere in the world – in Jerusalem or Istanbul, from the streets of Krakow to the mountains of the Machu Pichu, we find the same fundamental

human aspirations, we see how cultures influence each other, how they are irresistibly intertwined.

Poland was among the earliest supporters of the World Heritage Convention, adopting the Convention in 1976.

Poland has long stood as an example for its commitment to cooperation in the co-management of its transboundary sites.

While there are over a thousand sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, only two were inscribed following their reconstruction: Mostar Bridge in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and the Historic Centre of Warsaw. This attests to the power of culture to foster rebirth, at the heart of the Polish identity.

Among the 14 world heritage sites in Poland, the German Nazi Concentration and extermination camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau stands as a universal place of remembrance of the Genocide of the Jews, in memory of all the victims of the Holocaust. This is the most powerful call to foster human rights and reject denial, racism and all forms of antisemitism today.

Here in Krakow, a few steps away from the University where the great Copernicus studied physics and astronomy -- I can say that the World Heritage embodies a Copernican revolution.

It embodies a radical choice.

Instead of distorting our heritage in endless disputes about what belongs to who, about which heritage is the greatest, the biggest, the oldest... here we choose to unite for heritage, because World Heritage is not about division, it is about building common ground.

This is not a beauty contest, and this is not a political arena.

This is a place for expertise and the highest standards of excellence, it is a place for dialogue and mutual understanding.

This was the relentless commitment of the late Deputy Prime Minister of Cambodia, H.E. Mr Sok An, President of the 37th session of the World Heritage Committee, who unfortunately recently left us.

He worked his whole life for the promotion of the higher ideals of the World Heritage, and we owe it to him to continue on this journey.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Au moment d'ouvrir ce Comité, chacun mesure l'ampleur des enjeux auxquels nous faisons face.

Ce sont des enjeux humanitaires et de protection d'urgence du patrimoine menacé, au Mali et au Yémen, en Syrie et en Irak.

La destruction délibérée de ce patrimoine est un crime de guerre et une arme de guerre, une stratégie de nettoyage culturel, qui vise à la fois les vies humaines, les repères historiques, les écoles, les journalistes, les institutions du savoir et de la libre pensée.

L'UNESCO est pleinement consciente de sa responsabilité, et nous entendons l'assumer pleinement, pour coordonner l'action internationale, renforcer les politiques publiques, mettre en œuvre les programmes d'urgence, avec tous nos partenaires avec tous les acteurs de la société civile, qui se battent au quotidien.

Partout dans le monde, les Etats se mobilisent pour enrayer le trafic illicite des biens culturels, stopper le financement du terrorisme.

L'UNESCO a besoin de votre soutien, politique et financier, pour répondre aux demandes croissantes des peuples dont on détruit le passé pour étouffer l'avenir.

Notre réponse doit être forte sur le terrain, et forte aussi sur le plan moral.

Plus la Convention grandit, plus notre responsabilité est grande de respecter les règles, les textes et l'esprit de la Convention.

Personne n'oblige un Etat à inscrire un site au patrimoine mondial – et c'est librement, qu'à chaque nouvelle inscription, nous élevons le niveau d'excellence, d'exigence, de responsabilité, en vue de construire la paix.

Tel est l'esprit de la campagne #unis pour le patrimoine et son écho à travers le monde prouve combien le patrimoine peut mobiliser les consciences pour la paix, surtout auprès des jeunes.

Dans cette enceinte, contre les forces de la haine, contre les forces du repli, nous voulons célébrer et valoriser toutes les beautés, toute la richesse de notre patrimoine, qui porte nos identités, notre dignité, et dont nous sommes fiers.

Dans cette enceinte, nous sommes aussi les gardiens d'une conscience, qui aide chacun à s'élever au-dessus de l'histoire de son pays, de sa culture, de son origine, pour renforcer ensemble la trame universelle de notre humanité commune.

La Pologne, où des villes détruites, comme Varsovie, ont été reconstruites intégralement, connaît la force de la culture pour donner espoir, et reprendre confiance - la Pologne sait que partout où la culture se relève, un peuple se relève avec elle.

Cet esprit, cette conviction, nous devons la partager, et c'est l'appel que je vous lance aujourd'hui, pour l'ouverture de cette nouvelle session du Comité du Patrimoine mondial.

Je vous remercie.