



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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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 Irina Bokova,

Director-General of UNESCO

on the occasion of the launch of the Syrian Antiquities at Risk Emergency

Red List

New York, 25 September 2013

Mr Thomas P. Campbell, Director and Chief Executive Officer of the *Metropolitan Museum of Art*,

Dr Hans-Martin Hinz, President of the *International Council of Museums*,

Ms Anne Richard, Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration,

Ms Bonnie Burnham, President and Chief Executive Officer of the *World Monuments Fund*,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The situation today in Syria places before us a terrible moral and humanitarian situation – we are deeply *shocked* by the loss of so many lives, by the bombing of this country's unique heritage, and this shock must inspire us to action.

At UNESCO, we believe there is no choice to make between saving lives and saving cultural heritage.

Protecting heritage is inseparable from protecting populations, because heritage enshrines people's identities.

Heritage gives people strength and confidence to look to the future -- it is a force for social cohesion and recovery.

This is why protection of heritage must be an integral part of all humanitarian efforts.

This is the meaning of our presence today, in the Metropolitan Museum, a landmark institution that protects and shares the cultures of the world -- I wish also to thank the United States Department of State for its commitment in this regard.

The leadership of the Metropolitan Museum was shown last June with the return of two significant Khmer statutes to Cambodia, with the support of UNESCO, during UNESCO's World Heritage Committee -- I wish to commend once again the Metropolitan Museum and Ms Emily Rafferty, President of the Museum, for this gesture.

This historic restitution is a powerful example of good practice for collectors and art dealers worldwide, which, I believe, sets a moral standard for museums across the world.

Just a few meters away is one of the most exquisite period rooms on Islamic art -- known as the *Damascus Room* -- where visitors can enjoy the beauty and solemnity of delicate wood panels engraved with poetry -- I must say it is deeply moving to stand here today, just as Syria's heritage is under attack.

UNESCO is determined to use all its expertise and all its networks to help the Syrian people preserve their exceptional cultural heritage.

The Organization has taken the lead in coordinating efforts to safeguard Syria's cultural treasures during the current crisis, to mobilize all partners to fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

Direct intervention to control the widespread destruction and looting is not possible owing to the security situation.

Syria's irreplaceable heritage can only be protected through a coordinated international response.

This is why, since March 2012, I have called repeatedly for active cooperation from Syria's neighbours, as well as from its police and customs partners, to stiffen efforts to fight against illicit trafficking.

I have appealed to all countries concerned to respect their obligations under the provisions of UNESCO's 1970 Convention to fight against the illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

This has started to produce fruit, as cultural objects have recently been seized in neighbouring markets in Lebanon and Turkey.

In February 2013, UNESCO organized a technical meeting in Amman, Jordan, to better coordinate the international response in the fight against illicit trafficking.

This brought together UNESCO's international partners in this field, including the *International Council of Museums*, and it produced an action plan, which provided the basis for decisions taken during the High-Level Meeting held at UNESCO's Headquarters on 29 August.

The *International Council of Museums* has long been one of UNESCO's most valuable partners in this fight.

It is in this spirit that I welcome the launch of the *International Council of Museums'* Red List for Syria's endangered cultural heritage.

ICOM Red Lists are important, because they help raise awareness and they facilitate the work of all professionals involved – police officers, customs officials and others.

This is the 12th such Red List, and I wish to express special thanks to the United States Department of State for its steadfast commitment in the fight against illicit trafficking of cultural property, particularly in the framework of the 1970 Convention -- to which the United States has been a party since 1983.

The United States is a central partner in all action undertaken by UNESCO in this area, with its specific implication on the *UNESCO Database of National Cultural Heritage Laws* and with its support to the ICOM Red Lists.

Thank you very much.