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Organización
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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 of the Expert Meeting on Syrian Heritage

Berlin, 2 June 2016

Excellency Minister of State Professor Maria Böhmer,

Distinguished Experts, Archaeologists, Heritage Defenders, from Syria and abroad,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply grateful to the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany, especially Minister of State and former Chair of the World Heritage Committee, Professor Maria Böhmer, for hosting this expert meeting here in Berlin.

Berlin carries special meaning when it comes to the protection of heritage.

This city has suffered the ravages of conflict and partition.

Berlin shows also the power of heritage to unite, to heal, to recover.

This history is an inspiration for us all today, as we turn together to tackle new challenges of heritage protection.

I wish to pay special tribute to all experts -- from Syria, from across the world -- who have come here today, to unite for heritage and find ways to protect it.

Experts from all countries are joining forces and sharing expertise, guided by a common commitment to preserve what unites all Syrians as a people, to safeguard what unites us all as a single humanity.

This is in itself a source of hope, and the starting point for dialogue and for peace.

This is what I would call 'the spirit of Berlin.'

The destruction of Syria's cultural heritage is deepening the suffering of the Syrian people.

This heritage belongs to all Syrians -- it is also world heritage and its loss is a blow to the humanity we all share.

Syria's *Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums* has taken thousands of objects into safekeeping.

It has worked tirelessly on documenting damages, undertaking first-aid and prevention measures, advocating for cultural heritage.

Archaeologists and ordinary citizens are risking their lives to document and save the country's memory and future.

I wish to pay special tribute to the *Association for the Protection of Syrian Archaeology* (APSA), ASOR, *Shirīn International*, the *Syrian Heritage Archive Project*, *Heritage for Peace*, The Day After (TDA) and many others, who have come to Berlin today, to share their experience.

This meeting is a new opportunity for UNESCO to listen to their needs, to identify ways to support, to jointly plan with you all the future steps for the safeguarding of Syria's built, movable and intangible cultural heritage.

To succeed, we call on Syrian heritage professionals to take the lead and design the way forward.

This means much more than saving stones and buildings.

Syrian heritage exemplifies values at the heart of all human society.

This heritage is living proof of the dignity and freedom of the Syrian people.

This heritage shows how cultures permeate each other... how they have always been enriched by exchange and mutual influence in this crossroads of civilizations, from Assyria to Greece to Rome to Persia to Islam.

Syria's heritage shows that culture is a common denominator for dialogue and peace... above and beyond all political differences.

Countries from East and West, North and South have expressed their will to contribute to protecting this heritage, to sharing expertise, resources and support.

Despite delays, this mobilization sends a powerful signal of hope and renewal, which can grow on the basis of clear principles.

This meeting is an opportunity to reaffirm these principles.

First, the destruction of heritage is part and parcel of the humanitarian crisis -- its safeguarding is linked with the protection of human lives.

Second, Syria's heritage is indivisible -- Palmyra and Aleppo, the Crac des Chevaliers and Mari... this World Heritage is the heritage of all Syrians, without distinction -- and it is our role to rally the international community to support you in safeguarding it.

To succeed, we need prudence, responsibility and respect for priorities in a country where a conflict is raging.

The priority is to have a clear assessment of where we stand, to be able to move forward.

The priority is to safeguard what is possible, wherever possible, while maintaining high-quality scientific work, building on the best of international expertise, in a participative and inclusive process.

In 2014, UNESCO adopted an *Emergency Plan of Action* -- we must take stock of what has been done, what has not been done, and what needs to be done.

I am convinced we can do more and better.

UNESCO is determined to work with everyone, to focus on heritage, in a constructive spirit.

All participants today -- more than 230 experts -- have come, leaving politics aside, to focus on solutions for the future, to ensure culture is not instrumentalized.

This is the spirit of this meeting.

This is the spirit of Berlin, so that tomorrow culture may rise again, along with the people of Syria.

Thank you very much.