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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 Conference “Conflict Antiquities: Forging a public /
private response to save the endangered patrimony of Iraq and Syria”**

UNGA 2015

New York, 29 September 2015

Mr Antony Blinken, Deputy Secretary of State of the United States,

Mr Tom Campbell, President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I cannot think of a better place for this conference....

I am deeply honoured to be here, with so many partners, so many friends, all
committed to the protection of heritage.

The United States, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and UNESCO have long joined
forces to protect the shared heritage of humanity.

Two years ago, we launched the Syria Red List.

One year ago, we met in this very building, with Secretary of State John Kerry, to
mobilize the global community.

We were together earlier this year at Le Louvre, for the launch of the *Red List of
Iraqi Antiquities*.

In June, with Under-Secretary of State Richard Stengel, we brought experts and
collectors to UNESCO to share information on the scale of looting.

This cooperation has never been so important.

In Iraq, in Syria, we are seeing attacks against culture on unprecedented scale, we see communities attacked, we see heritage destroyed and looted.

Terrorists are attacking history, because they are afraid of its message, because it delegitimises them.

Let me take this opportunity to welcome the transfer of the first suspect to the ICC in the Mali Investigation for the war crime of the intentional destruction of monuments and buildings dedicated to religion – this is major step forward, for justice, against impunity.

The stakes are high.

Satellite images show archaeological sites in Syria riddled by thousands of holes -- illegal excavations are taking place on industrial scale.

Looting and trafficking of “blood antiquities” are accelerating the destruction of cultural heritage.

All this exacerbates violence -- weakening the fabric of societies, attacking the identity of people and communities, undermining their capacity to recover and resist.

This contributes to the financing of terrorism, closely linked with the trafficking of weapons and drugs.

We must continue to respond in every way we can.

This starts with political mobilisation, through the United Nations Security Council – Resolution 2199, under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, extends to Syria the prohibition of trade of cultural objects in place for Iraq since 2003 – through the United Nations General Assembly, at the European Parliament, at UNESCO.

We are supporting Governments across the world in strengthening legislation, in building capacities, in raising awareness....

UNESCO is bringing together all partners, with INTERPOL, ICOMOS, the World Custom Organizations, the museums, the art market, experts of the civil society.

I take this opportunity to welcome the actions underway here, in the United States of America, in light of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199, through *The Protect and Preserve International Cultural Property Act*.

The United States Delegation has just submitted to the UNESCO Executive Board a draft resolution on the role of education to prevent and counter violent extremism.

In July this year, the United States Ambassador to Iraq, Mr Stuart Jones, returned to the National Museum in Baghdad 700 objects recovered during a US Delta Force commando raid on the Syrian compound of ISIL's senior financial officer.

This was first proof that ISIL is trafficking antiquities.

This bears witness to the nature and scale of this trafficking - this is not a collateral damage.

At the international level, the ratification and implementation of UNESCO 1970 Convention against illicit trafficking is a first key step.

Combined with other instruments, we have a strong legal basis to build on, and this is what UNESCO is doing, across the board.

This includes action to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199, assisting Governments in bolstering border controls, in improving coordination across services, in training of police and custom officers.

The art market and major auction houses are essential, as they understand the risk of illicit trafficking for their own market security and credibility -- UNESCO is working with them, sharing information, strengthening due diligence, forging stronger public/private alliances.

We must also counter the hate propaganda that fuels violent extremism.

This is why I went to Baghdad in March, to launch a global social media campaign, #Unite4Heritage, to strengthen youth voices against the narratives of violent extremism.

The same spirit guides the *Global Coalition for the Protection of Cultural Heritage*, launched at the World Heritage Committee meeting in Bonn, last June.

The stakes are high.

This is about those who believe in living together, in a single humanity -- and those who seek to spread division, hatred and violence.

This is why it is so important that we stand united and firm, to share information, to bolster cooperation, to counter cultural cleansing.

Fundamentally, this is about defending peace, it is about protecting the humanity we all share.

So I wish to thank once again the United States Government, the Metropolitan Museum and all partners here today.