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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 Stakeholders Roundtable “Despoiled and Destroyed:
Ancient Civilizations of Iraq and Syria”**

UNESCO, 1 June 2015

Mr Richard Stengel, Under Secretary of State,

Ms Evan Ryan, Assistant Secretary of State,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to open this important Roundtable.

Let me express sincere thanks to the United States Department of State and the United States Mission to UNESCO for this initiative – especially Ambassador Crystal Nix Hines, Permanent Delegate of the United States to UNESCO.

We meet at a time when I believe it has never been so important to shape concrete actions to work better together.

Today, in Iraq and Syria, we see the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage, monuments and sites – this is a war crime that is used as a tactic of war, to spread fear and hatred.

We see the persecution of communities on cultural and religious grounds, in an attempt to destroy the cultural diversity that has always been the hallmark of this region.

We see massive looting and illicit trafficking of cultural objects, to finance terrorism, with archaeological sites riddled by thousands of looting holes.

All this is part of a strategy of cultural cleansing, which seeks to destroy the past, present, and future of the cradle of human civilization.

These are attacks against the very notion of civilized order, against the humanity we share, against the values that bind us together as a single human family.

We need to respond.

We must respond, guided by the conviction that the protection of heritage is far more than a cultural issue — it is a security imperative that should be built into all peacebuilding strategies.

UNESCO has alerted the world about the destruction of cultural heritage – we are working flat-out to mobilize the international community, to coordinate more effective action.

We are seeing movement across the board.

The United Nations Security Council has established clearly the link between illicit trafficking and the financing of terrorism, calling on UNESCO, with INTERPOL, to assist Member States in the implementation of a ban on trade of cultural objects from Iraq and Syria.

I wish to congratulate the United States Department of State for the recent bill introduced by the House of Representatives to adopt a ban on imports of all Syrian antiquities in the United States.

Just last week, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution, at the initiative of Germany and Iraq, cosponsored by 91 states, which bears witness to the mobilization of the international community.

This resolution has been preceded by two important resolutions adopted by the Executive Board of UNESCO, at the Initiative of France and Iraq in September, and at the initiative of Italy and Spain in April.

We have a strong legal basis to build on -- with the UNESCO 1970 Convention, the Hague 1954 Convention, and UNESCO's 1972 World Heritage Convention -- as well as UNODC International Conventions against money laundering and corruption.

Our task now is to connect the dots -- to join all partners, to build wider and stronger coalitions well beyond the "culture box", with each actor bringing its expertise, leading its specific role.

Coordination is essential, and I see this precisely as the role of UNESCO -- this is why we have brought together INTERPOL, UNODC, ICOM, ICOMOS, ICCROM, UNIDROIT, and sent clear guidelines for action to all States, museums and core actors of the art market.

We are working with the Security Council, and we are coordinating with the International Criminal Court -- these lines of action will be strengthened and driven forward.

This is the importance of this Roundtable, which provides a vital platform for us to explore who can do what, and how we can work more effectively together.

Mesdames et Messieurs,

Ce défi nous impose de renouveler les moyens de lutte contre le terrorisme et l'extrémisme.

Nous savons que l'extrémisme ne peut être vaincu par la force des armes uniquement.

Nous devons aussi gagner la bataille des idées.

Nous devons expliquer la valeur de ce patrimoine, aider à comprendre pourquoi il fait partie de l'identité, de l'histoire, des repères des peuples, de leur sécurité et de leur vie.

Tout un pan de notre histoire commune est en train de disparaître, un héritage millénaire qui s'est enrichi de la diversité des cultures, et qui raconte l'histoire de notre humanité.

Il y a autour de cette table de nombreux acteurs clés, chacun prêt à apporter des réponses dans son domaine, et c'est précisément de cette unité dont nous avons le plus besoin aujourd'hui.

Dans cet esprit, je me réjouis de vous accueillir à l'UNESCO.

Je vous remercie.