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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Francesco Bandarin,
Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO
at the Annual Meeting of UNESCO Honorary and
Goodwill Ambassadors
UNESCO, 30 June 2014**

Your Royal Highness, Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends,

It is both an honour and a pleasure to participate in this year's meeting of the UNESCO Honorary and Goodwill Ambassadors. Today I would like to speak to you about cultural heritage in conflict zones – a most serious topic to which UNESCO attaches great importance, particularly in the current state of international affairs.

Culture is increasingly on the front line of conflicts across the world. We have seen this in the 1990s in South East Europe, and during this century in Afghanistan, Iraq, and more recently in Mali and Syria, where religious monuments, archaeological sites, manuscripts but also time-honoured traditions and cultural practices are under threat.

Some people consider it inappropriate to speak about culture and heritage in the midst of political instability and humanitarian crises. Indeed, culture is often regarded as a secondary concern when human lives are at stake. However, UNESCO's response is very clear: "culture matters in times of conflict" and "protecting heritage is a security issue". We believe that here can be no lasting peace without respect for peoples' culture.

Protecting our cultures and heritages concerns all of us. UNESCO is convinced that culture is a force for mutual understanding and a motor for local economic and social development. It is for this reason that our Organization has emerged as the

leading international advocate for the essential role of culture in the post-2015 development agenda.

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We believe that there here are many good reasons for protecting culture in conflict. I would like to briefly make the 'case for culture' before you today.

Damaging cultural heritage is a crime

In recent decades, the world has witnessed many tragic attacks against some of humanity's most cherished cultural treasures. We all recall the mindless destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan in 2001, which UNESCO qualified as a "crime against culture" at the time. A few sticks of dynamite were enough to destroy an irreplaceable site that had been venerated for centuries.

In the same year, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia found a general guilty of war crimes for attacking the World Heritage site of Dubrovnik.

In response to the increasing number of examples of culture being targeting in conflicts and subject to intentional destruction, UNESCO has spared no effort to ensure that international obligations are upheld and to fight impunity on cultural heritage destruction. In 2003, UNESCO adopted the non-binding Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage.

Thanks largely to UNESCO's efforts, the UN General Assembly has passed resolutions condemning the destruction of cultural heritage and the illicit trafficking of cultural property in Mali (Res. 2100 adopted in April 2013) and Syria (Res. 2139 adopted in February 2014). It was the case already in 2003 for Iraq.

In the case of Mali, UNESCO cooperates closely with the International Criminal Court in conjunction with its investigation in northern Mali in conformity with its Statutes, which qualify as "war crimes" direct attacks against buildings dedicated to religion, education, art, science or charitable purposes, historic monuments.

Protecting culture in conflict zones makes economic sense.

Cultural heritage is a precious resource for economic recovery. Cultural tourism linked to heritage is a source of socio-economic development for many local communities. In conflict zones, tourism is often the hardest hit economic sector. For example in Timbuktu, 'tourism and its related activities - hotels, restaurants, crafts - accounted for 80% of the city's legal revenues and employment. Recovering from the crisis and improving security to attract visitors once again will be determinant in the long-term socio-economic prospects of Timbuktu.

In addition to these measurable consequences, **the destruction of cultural heritage has numerous intangible consequences for societies.**

Attacks against cultural heritage constitute attacks the very heart and soul of communities. They deprive them of the material testimonies to their past and their identities, which are essential to guaranteeing fundamental cultural rights and nurturing stable societies. By destroying culture, aggressors often deliberately seek to unravel social fabric and weaken the very foundations of social cohesion. Moreover acts of wilful destruction of heritage assets make reconciliation between conflicting parties much more difficult in the future, and hold societies back from turning the page towards peace.

In Sarajevo and in Dubrovnik, the belligerents burned libraries and detached street signs, in an attempt to erase the cities' past. The Old Bridge in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, was destroyed for the same reasons. It was a picturesque pedestrian bridge, with no strategic significance. It was destroyed to separate communities, and inflame tensions. UNESCO much publicized project to reconstruct the Old Bridge in Mostar involving the war veterans has become a powerful symbol of reconciliation and peace This year, we are celebrating the tenth anniversary of its reconstruction.

It is for this reason that the extremists in Mali began destroying the mausoleums of Timbuktu, ransacked manuscripts and suppressed certain traditional practices. In

August 2013, UNESCO began working on the ground with the first restoration activities in Timbuktu. UNESCO has also been mandated to implement training programmes for the civil and military personnel of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). I am pleased to report that these activities are progressing well.

In numerous cases, we have seen the power of heritage to bring together divided communities and promote international cooperation in difficult contexts. Particularly at difficult times, such as in situations of conflict or after a disaster, heritage is an essential element of material and psychological support, as it provides a much-needed sense of continuity, dignity and hope in better times.

Before closing, I would now like to turn briefly to **UNESCO's action in Syria.**

The situation on the ground is particularly alarming. The six World Heritage sites have all been placed on the Heritage in Danger list in 2012 have been heavily damaged. Many of them are occupied by military troops and have become battlefields. The Old Town of Aleppo has been devastated.

The looting of archeological sites and illicit trafficking have reached unprecedented levels.

Major collections in the 38 museums of Syria, along with manuscripts, are reported to have been transferred to safe storage areas, but damaged has been sustained by several important museums throughout the country.

As in the cases of Libya and Mali, the Director-General issued several international appeals and mobilized the international community since the outbreak of hostilities in Syria. In these cases, UNESCO uses its convening power to alert the military and civil authorities, customs and police forces and art market players of their responsibility to protect culture properties amid conflict and to prevent the illicit trafficking of cultural goods. Towards these ends, we work closely with national authorities and partners, such the World Customs Organization and INTERPOL, the International Council of Museums, as well as leading auction houses.

Regarding intangible heritage, traditional practices, skills, ceremonies and other expressions of living heritage have been disrupted, as in the emblematic case of the destruction of the souk of Aleppo.

In early 2013 UNESCO established an Action Plan to serve as a road map to safeguard Syria's cultural heritage. On the basis of this plan, the EU funded a 2.46 million EUR project to undertake emergency safeguarding measures for cultural heritage and plan post-recovery actions. This project is being piloted from the UNESCO Beirut Office. Last month UNESCO hosted an international meeting of 120 experts from 22 countries to coordinate efforts and refine the action plan.

In its strategy to deal with heritage in conflict, UNESCO has defined the three main lines of action:

First, we must consolidate our legal framework of international treaties for the heritage protection, including the famous Conventions for World Heritage and Intangible Heritage. Particularly relevant for heritage in conflict are two other UNESCO culture conventions: the 1954 Hague Convention, the only international agreement of universal vocation focused exclusively on the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict; and the 1970 Convention devoted to combating illicit trafficking in cultural property. To successfully implement these conventions, we must build stronger 'coalitions for culture' – through closer coordination with all partners involved, including armed forces, INTERPOL, the World Customs Organization, and other actors such as international auction houses.

Secondly we must strengthen our presence on the ground by engaging in peacetime safeguarding measures such as inventorying. Our emergency assistance in wartime is of course conditional on the security situation.

Thirdly we must step up our advocacy and fundraising efforts. Leaders in the public and private sector as well as the general public need to understand that protecting heritage is not secondary; it's not a luxury. It has never been more urgent.

And this brings me to you, dear Honorary and Goodwill Ambassadors. I would like to appeal to all of you to join our efforts. As spokespeople for this excellent cause, you can rally invaluable worldwide support.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Metin Arditi Special UNESCO Envoy for Intercultural Dialogue for his unwavering commitment to the arts in the service of peace and his instrumental role in organizing the conference entitled “*La destruction du patrimoine culturel en situation de conflit*”, at the University of Geneva last April with the participation of UNESCO’s Director-General.

The Culture Sector welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with other Goodwill Ambassadors in our ongoing efforts to protect all forms of heritage in times of conflict.

I thank you for your attention.