

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by
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(UNESCO)

on the occasion of the inauguration of the
30th anniversary World Heritage Congress

“World Heritage 2002: Shared Legacy, Common Responsibility”

Venice, Italy, 14 November 2002

Your Highnesses,
Honourable Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you here today to open this 30th anniversary World Heritage Congress, on the theme of “World Heritage 2002: Shared Legacy, Common Responsibility”.

I would like immediately to thank and pay tribute to the Italian Government, the City of Venice and other Italian authorities, agencies and partners for their key role in making this important Congress possible. You are all to be congratulated for your innovation, creativity and dedication that have brought us together here in Venice this week.

As you know, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the year 2002 as the **United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage**. It also invited UNESCO to serve as the lead agency for the Year, which has been a valuable opportunity to deepen and extend international cooperation in the field of heritage protection and the promotion of cultural diversity.

During the UN Year, over and above the promotion of greater public awareness of the importance of cultural heritage, UNESCO has given particular emphasis to three key areas of activity, namely, the

role of cultural heritage in economic development, its role in promoting reconciliation, and the importance of partnership.

These emphases are revealing of the way that our approach to world heritage has not stood still. Far from it! If today we stress the role of heritage for defining individual and group identity, for building social cohesion, for establishing bridges to encourage intercultural dialogue and understanding, for promoting economic growth, and for celebrating cultural diversity in all its forms, this is because we have learned a number of lessons over the past three decades. Our most effective teacher has been life itself, which repeatedly forces us to question our assumptions and to open our eyes to new unseen dimensions of the heritage agenda.

In the perspective of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the protection of cultural heritage cannot be separated from the preservation of the cultural diversity of humankind. Moreover, at a time when some are talking of a “clash of civilizations”, I believe that intercultural dialogue can only be enhanced by the existence of world cultural heritage, which is everyone’s birthright.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As one of the key events held during this United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, the Director-General places great importance on

this meeting. Indeed, Mr Matsuura will be joining us on Saturday, November 16 - exactly 30 years since the *World Heritage Convention* was adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1972.

This Congress has three principal aims:

The first is **to assess the past three decades of implementation of the *World Heritage Convention***. How has it contributed to the protection of natural and cultural heritage world-wide? What progress has been made in the development of appropriate national and international heritage protection legislation and practices? Has progress been made in building the capacity at local and regional levels for the management of World Heritage cultural and natural sites?

Our second goal for this Congress is **to increase the visibility of the *World Heritage Convention*** and of UNESCO's activities to protect World Heritage. We hope that promoting the Convention in this way will lead to new activities to ensure long-term conservation as well as increasing awareness of the need to preserve World Heritage.

The third main goal of the Congress is **to mobilize support for specific actions and identify fresh opportunities** relating to world heritage conservation. We hope to create synergies between World Heritage stakeholders and to encourage the development of targeted partnerships for site protection and presentation.

UNESCO wishes to thank the many partners who, by participating in and contributing to this event, are showing interest in the idea of creating new partnerships for the future and building thereby a broader base of heritage conservation. Some of these partners are new, others have been working in support of World Heritage conservation for many years. We are most grateful to all of them.

Since its adoption by UNESCO in November 1972, the *World Heritage Convention* has made an important contribution to the identification and protection of natural and cultural heritage sites considered to be of outstanding universal value to humanity. With 175 States Parties and 730 sites inscribed on the World Heritage List, its role as an important international legal tool for conservation is well-established. Indeed, this *Convention* is almost universal in its coverage.

Ensuring that World Heritage sites sustain the outstanding universal value for which they have been designated is an increasingly complex challenge. Of the 730 World Heritage sites, 33 have been formally declared as World Heritage in Danger. Many other World Heritage sites face threats to their long-term integrity and survival.

It is therefore vital to mobilize resources to consolidate and expand existing levels of technical and administrative expertise and

financial assistance to safeguard the proper management of these outstanding sites.

The *World Heritage Convention* established a World Heritage Fund, currently handling about US\$4 million per year. In addition, the *Convention* recognises the need for States Parties, as the principal stakeholders in the conservation of cultural and natural heritage of World Heritage value, to work with a range of partners.

For this purpose, UNESCO and its World Heritage Centre have begun to develop partnership agreements with both governmental and non-governmental organizations for the conservation of World Heritage sites. Let me express our particular thanks for the contribution made by the United Nations Foundation, which has given a tremendous boost to our work. The UNF's substantial financial contributions have increased the scale of our operations and also brought a new energy and focus to our work to protect biodiversity through World Heritage conservation.

Building and maintaining a system of international co-operation and support requires further efforts, innovation and commitment. In the period ahead, UNESCO will place special emphasis on building new types of partnerships for World Heritage conservation. We shall foster South-South co-operation, North-South relations that go beyond the conventional donor-recipient arrangements, and partnerships with an increased number of countries, governmental or intergovernmental

organisations and NGOs. We shall seek to work more closely with research institutions, the corporate sector, trust funds and foundations and individuals who have expressed a keen interest to contribute to World Heritage conservation.

We have to create a network!

Our emphasis on partnership rests on a balance between duties and rights. We have to shoulder our responsibility, both individually and collectively, for preserving and protecting our heritage now and in the future. Each of us, every citizen of the world, has his or her share of the common heritage but this right of enjoyment is joined with corresponding duties – to understand, to protect, to transmit. Moreover, universal enjoyment of heritage generates a global obligation of solidarity. We have a collective responsibility to safeguard our common human heritage. It is a responsibility, furthermore, that links past, present and future generations in a chain of reciprocity and care.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is now with pride and pleasure that I declare this World Heritage Congress open.

Thank you.