

Venice, 16 November 2002

**Marianna V. Vardinoyannis, UNESCO Goodwill
Ambassador.**

Speech

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe that all of us who have the pleasure and the honour to be here today, in the historical city of Venice, feel the same optimism for the international movement which finds its practical expression in the extremely significant UNESCO initiative for the protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The signature of the corresponding convention, which took place in Paris 30 years ago, represents the considerable effort based on the ideals and principles of UNESCO's philosophy ; the principles which have made UNESCO the champion of peace, international solidarity and culture.

The Protection of the World's Cultural Heritage is not only our obligation to the past, but also our duty to the future. The monuments which our ancestors have left us are the living proof and testimony to the history of peoples, and to the factors which shaped their identity. These monuments go beyond the passage of time. They are symbols; both national and universal, in the same way that the messages we draw from them are universal.

Today, the protection of cultural heritage is closely linked to the promotion of dialogue between cultures; as it is culture that brings people closer, contributes to mutual understanding, and is a safeguard of peace.

This outstanding concept of UNESCO gives us all the right to feel proud. Numerous examples of the rescue, conservation and restoration of monuments in so many countries, are the best possible proof of the success accomplished and the achievements yet to come.

Who can forget the ground-breaking initiative of UNESCO when, in 1959, it launched an international campaign to restore Egyptian and Sudanese Cultural Heritage sites: an attempt to

save the Abu Simbel temples in the Nile Valley, which were threatened with flooding as a result of the construction of the Aswan High Dam. This effort paved the road for the convention on the protection of cultural heritage.

I am particularly pleased that my native Greece was among the first twenty countries to sign towards the ratification of the convention in December 1972.

I could not imagine more efficient protection for the World Cultural Heritage than the love extended to it by every citizen of the world. I believe that within this framework we have to discover ways of making both the Convention, and UNESCO's efforts to protect World Heritage, better known. A decisive role in the realization of this goal must be played by the provision of suitable education for children and families. It is precisely this idea which is promoted by the Foundation for the Child and the Family of which I am president

At this point I would like to emphasise the substantial contribution of the Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, to this great endeavour which encourages and sets an example, by giving an even greater impetus both to international cooperation and to individual countries' efforts in the protection of cultural heritage.

The invaluable support afforded to this conference by the Italian Government, and by the City of Venice, underlines once more the rich cultural history and tradition of this country, and in this respect its contribution to world culture. The organisers have given this conference the setting it deserves, as Venice has a long-standing friendship with UNESCO. I well remember the international campaign that UNESCO launched to save Venice after disastrous floods threatened the city on November 4th 1966.

All the personalities participating in, and supporting, this conference, have demonstrated their affection for culture. I believe that this conference has reinforced the significance of this alliance of people from so many different countries, sharing a common vision of culture and a common aim: to hand it over to succeeding generations.

Thank you.

