

Appeal of 2nd December 1966

by René Maheu, the Director-General of UNESCO, at the opening of the international campaign for Venice and Florence:

"During the first days of November, Tuscany and Venetia were devastated by floods of extraordinary magnitude and violence. The damage has been enormous. To the toll in human lives and the loss of property were added the destruction, in Florence and Venice, of creations of the human spirit which made the enchantment of the culture and art of living that Italy has given to the world.

In all, 885 works of art of the first importance, 18 churches and some 10,000 other objects have suffered. Seventy libraries and learned institutions have been stricken. More than 700,000 volumes of archives comprising some 50 million items, of which 10,000 were of inestimable historical and scientific value, have been damaged.

Florence and Venice! The names alone say why Italy's grief is ours. But they indicate also why Italy's resolution to preserve and restore everything that can be saved will be the common purpose of us all. Venice sinking into the waters, it is as if one of the most radiant stars of beauty were suddenly engulfed; Florence bemired, it is the springtime of our hearts which is for ever disfigured. We will not resign ourselves to such disasters.

The General Conference of UNESCO, which has just concluded its fourteenth session, has decided unanimously to issue an urgent appeal 'to the spirit of fellowship of Member States to assist, to the fullest extent of their means, the efforts of the Italian people and authorities to preserve and restore cultural property that has been or is in danger of being damaged'.

In so doing, UNESCO in no way wishes to take the place of the aid and cooperation, public and private, which Italy's innumerable friends throughout the world have spontaneously offered and are prepared to furnish directly. The brotherhood of man that the international agencies seek to promote and to organize is nurtured by the living springs of natural and historic friendships between persons and peoples.

But UNESCO, called upon by its Constitution to assure 'the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science' can, as the Italian Government has requested, assemble and distribute information regularly on the needs, on the one hand, and offers of aid on the other. In this way outside assistance may be best directed by stages, in agreement with the Italian authorities, to meet the needs and fit the possibilities of the situation.

Most important, UNESCO can stimulate international solidarity - and that indeed should be its role. Just six years ago, from this very platform, my

predecessor launched a pressing appeal to the world to save the monuments of Egyptian and Sudanese Nubia which were threatened to be flooded as a result of the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Fifty countries responded to that appeal. Today it can be said that the safeguarding of the antiquities of Nubia is accomplished or assured, including the unique monumental ensemble of Abu Simbel. I am sure that once again mankind will not fail to acknowledge and act to save its common heritage, thereby acknowledging again and reaffirming its profound spiritual unity.

On behalf of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization I address a solemn appeal to the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind for the preservation and restoration of the damaged cultural treasures of Florence and Venice.

I call upon the 120 Member States of UNESCO, and first of all upon their governments, to give generous aid in the form of money, equipment and services to carry out this immense task of preservation and restoration which will require several years.

I call upon museums, libraries, archives and learned institutions in all the countries to put their experts, their laboratories and their workshops at the disposal of the corresponding Italian institutions whose installations and collections have suffered. I call upon those international organizations of specialists which are closely associated with UNESCO's work in this field - the International Council of Museums, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, and the International Federation of Library Associations and the International Council on Archives - to promote and coordinate efforts in this respect.

I call upon the writers, artists, musicians, critics and historians, indeed all those - and they are legion - whose works have been inspired by the treasures of Florence or Venice, to donate a part of what they have gained - they know better than anyone else that they can never repay their true debt, which is a spiritual one - and to help us with their talents in reaching the public.

I call upon museums, art galleries, theatres, and concert halls, foundations and private collections, which glory in the works we owe to the genius of Florence and Venice, to organize exhibitions, performances, and other events, devoted to Florence and Venice, the proceeds of which would go to the funds that have been set up in many countries, and by UNESCO itself, to receive voluntary financial contributions.

I call on the millions and tens of millions of persons who have visited these famous cities, even if only once, and who have returned enriched for the rest of their lives, to send one dollar - or whatever they can - to UNESCO.

Finally, I also call on all those who have never been to Florence or Venice, and many of whom may never have that chance, to contribute something: be it money or work - something of themselves. Each one of us knows himself to

be a member of the family of Man. How then could any one of us remain indifferent to the fate of these most precious jewels of our common human heritage?"