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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

## Text of the video message from

**Ms Mechtild Rössler**

**Director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre,**

**on the occasion of the opening of the**

**African World Heritage Regional Youth Forum**

***“Increasing youth involvement in the promotion and  
protection of African World Heritage”***

**29 April 2016**

Greetings young Africans!

On behalf of UNESCO, I am delighted to extend to you all a warm welcome to this Anglophone African Regional World Heritage Youth Forum.

First and foremost, allow me to congratulate the participants from 24 African countries. Each one of you has been selected to represent your country in consideration of your achievements, talents and enthusiasm.

My sincere thanks go to the African World Heritage Fund, the co-organizer of this event and UNESCO's valued partner, which is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. I also wish to express my gratitude to the Robben Island Museum for generously hosting the forum and to the South African authorities for their support. It is most fitting that this forum is taking place on Robben Island. This iconic World Heritage property bears powerful lessons for all Africans and the world at large about universal values of freedom and human solidarity.

As you may know, this youth forum coincides with the first edition of African World Heritage Day on the 5<sup>th</sup> of May. This new international day was designated last year by UNESCO's General Conference to promote understanding and appreciation of World Heritage especially among youth. UNESCO firmly believes that heritage is about identities and the belonging that binds us all together as members of a common global community. UNESCO also

recognizes the need to build the capacities of young Africans to take ownership of their heritage.

This forum is part of this vital process of informing, training and involving young people, which drives the UNESCO World Heritage Education Programme. You have come to here to learn more about your continent's immense cultural and natural treasures, the World Heritage Convention and its implementation, and more generally about the importance of safeguarding this precious heritage against the numerous threats that have emerged amidst unprecedented economic and social transformations: armed conflict, terrorism, poaching, global warming, uncontrolled urban expansion, and mineral and oil exploration... and the list goes on.

Thanks largely to the global mobilization led by UNESCO in recent decades, people around the world have begun to understand the need to change the development equation, to strike a balance between conservation and development needs and fully recognize the tremendous potential of heritage to alleviate poverty, foster reconciliation, regional cooperation and drive sustainable development. This is one of the crucial messages of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

The UNESCO culture conventions serve as the interface between culture and development. They are the meeting points between how we understand the world and the tools with which we shape it. Each Convention is unique but they are interrelated. Together, they embody a singular approach to understanding heritage. For example the World Heritage Convention and the 2003 Intangible Heritage Convention function in a complementary manner in so far as many heritage sites possess both material and intangible values that cannot be dissociated. This synergy between built and natural heritage sites on one hand, and spirituality and traditional knowledge and skills on the other hand, is particularly visible in numerous African heritage sites, such as the Tombs of the Bugunda Kings at Kasubi in Uganda, to give just one example.

In light of the numerous conflicts in many regions of the world, including Africa, the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, known as the Hague Convention, and the 1970 Convention dealing with the illicit trafficking of cultural property have taken on special significance. Illicit trafficking of cultural property is a scourge that affects every region of the world today Practices of looting, theft and illegal excavations affect museums, cultural institutions, places of worship as well as archaeological sites worldwide. It causes irreparable damage to cultural heritage, and deprives a community of its

memory, the physical testimony of its past. Preserving cultural heritage must be a constant worldwide concern, and as representatives of Africa's youth, you must play a key role as caretakers and protectors of African cultural heritage and join the fight against its trafficking. UNESCO also works closely with museum professionals to develop innovative approaches to strengthening the role of young people in safeguarding cultural and natural heritage.

In this regard, I would like to highlight the #Unite4Heritage campaign. In response to the increased intentional destruction of heritage in the Middle East, Libya, Mali and elsewhere, UNESCO's Director-General launched this ambitious social media campaign in 2015 to counter propaganda of hatred, intolerance and violence, with messages of unity and solidarity. To date, some 450 UNESCO-created posts by the campaign have been viewed over 8 million times. Our goal is to put forward a counter narrative to extremism, hate and terrorism. You will learn more about this campaign and the World Heritage Volunteers programme in the course of the forum and I encourage you all to join us in these timely initiatives.

Dear Participants,

This forum is more than an occasion to learn and broaden your horizons. You have also come here to dialogue and express yourselves. Remember that this is your forum and we are very eager to hear your views. The recommendations that you as a group will formulate and adopt in the final days of the forum will be submitted to the African World Heritage Fund and UNESCO's World Heritage Centre.

It is precisely your approach to heritage safeguarding that will help to shape the policies and decisions of tomorrow. As its future caretakers, you will be responsible for the future of Africa's immense and diverse heritage. When you return to your home countries, we trust that you will champion the ideals enshrined in the World Heritage Convention.

I hope you will find this forum stimulating and enriching, and I wish you all much success in your future professional pursuits.

Thank you.

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