

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,  
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address by  
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at the opening of the meeting of the Special Committee  
of Governmental Experts to prepare a draft Convention and  
draft Recommendation to Member States concerning the  
protection of monuments, groups of buildings and sites

Paris, 4 April 1972

Your excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasant task to welcome the distinguished men and women who are about to take part in the work of the Special Committee of government experts to prepare a draft Convention and draft Recommendation to Member States concerning the protection of monuments, groups of buildings and sites.

I also have pleasure in welcoming the observers from non-Member States, the representatives of the Secretariat of the United Nations Conference on the Environment and those from the other agencies of the United Nations system, as well as the observers from international governmental and non-governmental organizations, whose presence on this occasion demonstrates their concern for the safeguarding of man's universal heritage.

At its fourteenth session, in 1966, the General Conference, which had already adopted in 1962 a Recommendation on Safeguarding the Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites, authorized me to study the possibility of arranging a system of international protection for monuments and sites. The Secretariat consequently carried out a detailed study of the question and sought the views of experts at two meetings, the first of which was held in February and March 1968, and the second in July 1969. These experts proposed that two draft instruments should be submitted to the General Conference for approval: a Recommendation to Member States which could serve as a basis for organizing and perfecting national systems of protection, and a Convention aiming at introducing an international system for safeguarding monuments, groups of buildings and sites of universal value.

In my opinion, the one set of regulations necessarily complements the other. On the one hand, indeed, it is first and foremost the responsibility of States to afford their national protection to a heritage which is of concern to all mankind but which is, none the less, situated within their sovereign territory. On the other hand, seeing the magnitude of the task and the universal value of the property to be protected, it is vital for the international community to give its assistance when national efforts alone are insufficient to safeguard monuments and sites whose disappearance or deterioration would be an irreparable loss.

The General Conference having declared itself in favour of the adoption of two international instruments of the type I have described, the Secretariat prepared a preliminary draft Recommendation and a preliminary draft Convention which were communicated to Member States in July 1971. The two revised drafts appearing in the final report which you have before you (SHC/MD/18), have been prepared on the basis of the observations and suggestions made in reply to this consultation.

The task now facing your Committee, which has been convened in accordance with resolution 3.412 adopted by the General Conference at its sixteenth session, in 1970, is to examine and finalize these two texts with a view to their submission to the General Conference at its seventeenth session, to be held from 17 October to the end of November 1972.

In my opinion, these draft instruments are of the greatest importance for the future of the work undertaken by the Organization to ensure not only, in the words of the Constitution, "the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of ... monuments of history and science", but also - in response to a more recent though no less pressing concern - the protection of the environment.

However, on the eve of the United Nations Conference on the Environment, to be held at Stockholm in June 1972, it seemed that the international regulations envisaged - which have always covered both the "cultural" heritage consisting of monuments and architectural groups of buildings, and the "natural" heritage, composed of natural sites and reserves and national parks - did not perhaps bring out the two aspects of the question clearly enough and did not strike a completely satisfactory balance between them. The Secretariat has therefore tried to remedy this defect in the revised drafts by laying increased stress on the protection of the natural heritage.

It is now, however, for your Committee to decide whether or not still more explicit provisions concerning the protection of the natural heritage should be incorporated in the texts which you have before you. In this connexion, you will no doubt wish to examine very closely the draft Convention drawn up by the United States of America (SHC/MD/18 Add.1), a weighty contribution that clearly merits the most careful consideration. You will, in addition, be able to take advantage of the observations and suggestions of the Secretariat of the Stockholm Conference and of the international non-governmental organizations which have elected to take part in your work. May I be permitted to express to them all my sincere thanks for the help they have been good enough to offer us.

As you will see, the two revised drafts are based on the principle that the cultural and natural heritage belongs to mankind as a whole, which means that it lies outside the proprietorship of States while remaining within the framework of their sovereignty. Similarly, the idea of protection, which has been used by many countries in their legislation to define official rights of intervention and is written into the Constitution of Unesco, has been preserved in both texts. It embraces preventive and corrective measures as well as the standards for ensuring the maintenance, the co-existence and the continuity of culture and of nature throughout the world.

Taking into account the economic, scientific and cultural value of the heritage situated in its territory, each of the States to which the proposed Recommendation is addressed will be called upon to formulate, develop and apply a policy designed to ensure, in the present as well as in the immediate or distant future, that active and continuing measures are taken to secure the effective

protection and presentation of this heritage. Whereas legislation in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth was characterized by a system of passive protection consisting essentially in the imposition of prohibitions and servitudes and only occasionally in the taking of corrective measures, Member States will be invited to complement such measures by positive action capable of generating new lines of approach at the general planning stage. Conceived in this spirit, the draft Recommendation should encourage countries to integrate the whole of the cultural and natural heritage with economic development and, in a general way, with the life of the community - a task which obviously requires governmental and administrative intervention to ensure that the various activities are closely co-ordinated.

To this end, Member States will need to equip themselves with the necessary institutions, including specialized protection services. These should be responsible not only for combating deterioration and damage to the cultural and natural heritage, but also for investigating their causes in order that the evil may be attacked at its root. A wide variety of scientific and technical personnel will have to be recruited and trained for this purpose, among them nature and monument conservancy workers (specialists in fauna and flora and in stonework), administrators, laboratory research workers, architects and construction engineers, specialists in the history of art and in the social and human sciences (sociologists, ethnologists, economists and planners) as well as geographers, geologists, agricultural experts and so forth.

The draft Convention, for its part, aims to institutionalize a form of international co-operation making it possible to come to the assistance of States, at their request, for the preservation and presentation of cultural or natural property of universal value which they are not fully able to safeguard by their own unaided means. The principles on which it is proposed to base such co-operation are those which have progressively emerged from the extensive safeguarding operations with which Unesco has been associated, or in which it is still participating, notably in connexion with the temples at Abu Simbel, at Philae in Nubia and at Borobudur in Indonesia; Venice, the whole of which is threatened; and the various archaeological monuments and sites - in Ethiopia, Iran, Peru, Tunisia and numerous other countries - action in respect of which has not yet reached such an advanced stage. It is true that, to date, these operations have been directed essentially towards safeguarding the monumental heritage, but there is nothing to prevent the techniques worked out for this purpose from being adapted to the conservation of natural sites.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I should like in conclusion, to stress the immense interest aroused by the draft international regulations which you are called on to examine.

As you know, the provisions envisaged in this draft instrument coincide with some of the problems with which the organizers of the United Nations Conference on the Environment are concerned. It has therefore been arranged that the text you finally agree on will be communicated to those attending the Stockholm Conference to give them an opportunity of judging how important for the protection

of the world heritage, and hence of the environment, the adoption of such a Convention would be.

Similarly, certain international non-governmental organizations, in particular the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and the International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) are taking a very close and active interest in the matter and can afford us valuable assistance. These two organizations, both established under the auspices of Unesco, enjoy consultative and associate relations with Unesco (Category A). They will thus naturally be called upon to take part in the various stages of the planning and execution of activities which may be entrusted to Unesco in this field.

To you, ladies and gentlemen, knowing as I do the importance and difficulties of your task, I wish to express my sincere gratitude for your contribution to the truly unprecedented task of preserving and harmonizing culture and nature which has been undertaken by Unesco, and to offer you my very best wishes for the success of your deliberations.