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Organización
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para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Address by Irina Bokova,

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**on the occasion of the presentation of the
UNESCO World Report “Investing in Cultural Diversity
and Intercultural Dialogue” during UNESCO Week
at the Shanghai World EXPO 2010**

Shanghai, 21 May 2010

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you today for the presentation of this Mandarin version of the UNESCO World Report, “Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue”.

I am particularly pleased that its publication coincides with the Shanghai World EXPO 2010, which is such a splendid tribute to humanity’s diversity in the third millennium.

The release of this report is also timely for other reasons.

Today, May 21, we are celebrating the United Nations “World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development.”

And, also, 2010 is the U.N. ‘International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures’. UNESCO has been designated lead agency of the Year, and in this capacity we are coordinating an array of initiatives launched around the world in favour of intercultural dialogue, mutual understanding and peace.

As UNESCO’s World Report highlights, understanding other cultures, seeing the many underlying attributes they share with our own, and learning to appreciate cultural diversity, are as crucial to successful international relations and cooperation as they are to living peacefully alongside one’s neighbours.

The quest for mutual understanding is as old as humankind, and finds its expression in these eloquent and wise words of the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu:

“The best methodology to understand everything is to view a person from his view, to view a family from its view, a village from a village, a state from a state, and to view all-under-heaven from the view of all-under-heaven’.

Today, in our modern world, cultures are coming into ever closer proximity to one another, both virtually, via communications technologies such as the internet, and also physically, through increasing geographical mobility. This creates opportunities as well as challenges for our societies.

Properly understanding these processes and ensuring they have positive outcomes – that they lead to greater appreciation and respect for other cultures, and to the safeguarding of cultural diversity - is an absolute necessity if we are to succeed in “Building, sustainable, inclusive and creative cities”, the theme of UNESCO Week during Shanghai World EXPO 2010. Of course it is not only a question of making our cities better places to live, but about improving our societies as a whole – and indeed about making the world more peaceful and safer for all of us.

As part of this process, it is also vital to acknowledge the dynamic nature of cultures and their influence on one another. They are not fixed entities separated by fault lines, but are in a constant state of flux.

Thus the necessary corollary of cultural diversity has to be intercultural dialogue, which, if successful, ensures that this diversity becomes a source of mutual enrichment, true encounter and open-mindedness, not a source of conflict.

UNESCO actively promotes the world’s great variety of cultures as a precious resource that we must cherish and do our utmost to preserve. These efforts date back to our Organization’s very beginnings and are enshrined in our Constitution, which refers to the ‘fruitful diversity of cultures’.

Our notion of culture has broadened significantly over the decades. Today, a comprehensive set of International Conventions protects every kind of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was signed by every one of our Member States. As the Declaration compellingly states, cultural diversity, “widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, moral and spiritual existence.”

China, this land of great beauty and striking contrasts, has a particularly rich and diverse cultural landscape. An annex of the World Report tells us that no fewer than 235 languages are spoken in this country. We also get a sense of the wealth of China’s cultural expressions from its 38 World Heritage Sites, from the 26 Chinese cultural elements included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity as well as the three elements in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

These latter include the unique design and practice of building wooden arch bridges found in Fujian Province and Zhejiang Province, along China’s south-east coast. The transmission and survival of these techniques is under threat from rapid urbanization, scarcity of timber and lack of available construction space.

The terrible 2008 Sichuan earthquake that destroyed many of the province’s Qiang villages prompted UNESCO to also include the Qiang New Year Festival on the List.

I pledge to ensure that UNESCO does everything within its power to help China safeguard the many treasures of its cultural heritage, for the benefit of future generations. UNESCO is also ready to strengthen its cooperation with China in promoting culture and cultural diversity.

This World Report provides new opportunities to discuss issues linked to the recognition of cultural diversity as a key element of sustainable development and social cohesion. It also addresses other timely topics such as the importance of cultural identities, or culture and conflict.

It explores a corollary of the refusal to see cultures as necessarily mutually exclusive: namely, the recognition that an individual can have several cultural identities at the same time. This is a promising avenue for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.

Chinese thought is distinguished by its capacity to integrate different and even contradictory truths, based on the belief that all things must essentially be compatible or made to be compatible. Once again, this leads to a completely different approach to inclusiveness and comprehensiveness to the one that prevails in Western societies, and opens new avenues for reconciliation and dialogue.

I sincerely hope this report will be well received in China and that it will generate constructive dialogue on all levels, particularly within the media, and among experts and decision-makers, to whom its recommendations for action are addressed.

In closing, I salute the Chinese Government and the people of China for organizing the Shanghai World EXPO 2010. I wish you much success with this impressive initiative highlighting talents and achievements from all over the world – proof indeed of the richness of cultural diversity.

Thank you.