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Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO
on *Heritage in Peril – Iraq and Syria***

New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 22 September 2014

Excellency John F. Kerry, United States Secretary of State,
Ambassador Nix-Hines, Permanent Delegate of the United States to UNESCO,
Ms Emily Rafferty, President of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,
Ms Elizabeth Duggal, Chair of ICOM-US,
Ms Bonnie Burnham, President of the World Monuments Fund,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply moved to be here, in this museum, in this symbolic moment embodying the commitment of the United States of America to safeguarding culture and heritage.

Allow me to start with the words of the late Russell E. Train, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency and founder of the World Wildlife Fund, who played a leading role in the birth of the World Heritage Convention.

In 2002, Russell Train said:

At this time in history, as the fabric of human society seems under attack by forces that deny the existence of a shared heritage, forces that strike at the heart of our sense of community, I am convinced World Heritage holds out a contrary and positive vision of human society and our human future.

These words express the spirit of all our action to safeguard heritage -- as a wellspring of identity and belonging for all to share.

I believe it is a powerful symbol we meet today near the Temple of Dendur, a gift from Egypt to the United States, recognition also of the campaign led by UNESCO with the United States to save the Nubian temples – this marked a turning point in international approaches to protecting humanity’s shared heritage, through joint action, through solidarity, and this shows the depth of the longstanding partnership between the United States and UNESCO.

Our vision is under attack.

We see today unprecedented ‘cultural cleansing,’ cultural eradication and cultural looting.

We are witnessing the intentional destruction of irreplaceable landmarks.

We see communities attacked on the basis of their identities.

We see the systematic looting of ancient sites for illicit trafficking, to finance extremist groups.

Culture is under attack today in Syria and Iraq.

These are attacks against people, against their identities, against their values and history, against their future – this is why the cultural and humanitarian dimensions of international responses cannot be delinked.

Protecting heritage must be an integral part of all peacebuilding.

This must be part of our response to extremism.

Saving the past of Iraq and Syria is essential to saving our collective future.

To build peace *tomorrow*, we need to safeguard *today* their heritage of diversity and tolerance – to prepare the ground for reconciliation.

One year ago, I joined many of you here at the Metropolitan Museum for the launch of the *ICOM Red List of Syrian Antiquities at Risk Emergency*.

Let me thank the Metropolitan Museum, a landmark institution for protecting and sharing the cultures of the world.

Ms Rafferty, we were together, over a year ago, for a moving ceremony of return to Cambodia by the Metropolitan of two major art treasures of the 10th century – let me underline the exemplary value of this gesture.

I wish to thank the United States Department of State for its longstanding leadership in safeguarding cultural heritage, working with UNESCO to build capacity for museums across the world -- I wish to thank Secretary of State Kerry for his personal engagement.

UNESCO is acting at several levels –

First, to mitigate risks of further destruction and pillaging, through monitoring and capacity-building for emergency safeguarding;

Second, to fight against illicit trafficking, calling for enhanced vigilance from neighbouring countries, customs agencies, museums and auction houses;

Third, to prepare for recovery and reconstruction, to contribute to dialogue and reconciliation;

We ring the bell for respect for international standards to protect cultural heritage during armed conflict, to bring those responsible to justice, joining forces with the International Criminal Court - we must ensure recognition that the destruction of cultural heritage is a crime against humanity.

As with the Nubian temples, this is the work of partnership.

For Syria, with support from the European Union, we are working with the *International Council on Monuments and Sites*, the *International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property*, the *International*

Council of Museums as well as with INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization – to create a monitoring mechanism and undertake urgent measures to mitigate risks and fight illicit trafficking.

I am convinced we can do more -- for example, I have called for consideration by the UN Security Council of a resolution to set an international ban on trade in Syrian cultural objects.

For Iraq, UNESCO has organised expert meetings, with ICCROM, ICOMOS, ICOM, Interpol and the World Customs Organisation.

On 17 July, I launched an *Emergency Response Action Plan* with all partners — starting with the creation of an online monitoring observatory.

I believe we need to act at the regional level, so I have sent letters to ministers of foreign affairs of all neighbouring countries, states parties and non-states parties, to the 1970 UNESCO Convention against the illicit trafficking of cultural goods, as well as to customs agencies, museums and auction houses, calling for heightened vigilance and control.

On June 17, July 28 and August 8, I made public statements to raise awareness on the importance of protecting Iraq's millennial heritage -- for instance, the Citadel of Erbil, newly inscribed on the World Heritage List.

UNESCO is determined to do more, and I look forward to working with all partners to conserve cultural heritage and prevent its loss.

This loss matters to the people of Syria and Iraq –it matters to all of us, it matters to all humanity.

This is our response to extremism.

It starts with culture – it starts with our sense of community, with our 'positive vision of human society,' as Russell Train once said.