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Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
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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,

Director-General of UNESCO

**on the occasion of the launch of the ICOM Libyan Red List (in German) at
the event “Palmyra Talks” at Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien**

Vienna, 26 April 2016

Dr. Michael Linhart, General Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Austrian Federal Ministry
for Europe

Dr. Christoph Bazil, Head of Section for Monuments and Restitution, Austrian Federal
Chancellery

Ms Sabine Haag, Director-General of the Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna,

Mr Hans Martin Hinz, President of ICOM International,

Excellency Alexa Wesner, Ambassador of the US to Austria

Ms Daniel Sepra, Director of the Jewish Museum Vienna

Ms Eva Nowotny, President of the Austrian National Commission for UNESCO

Excellency Ambassador Stranzl, Permanent Delegate of Austria to UNESCO,

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to join you in this wonderful Kunsthistorisches Museum for the launch
of ICOM's *Emergency Red List of Libyan Cultural Objects at Risk*, in German.

I wish to commend Austria and ICOM for the initiative of these “Palmyra Talks”.

The ancient city of Palmyra endured systematic destruction during nearly one year
of occupation – it has become a symbol of the war against culture led by violent
extremists across the world.

Our task is to turn this around.

We can make Palmyra a symbol of unity of the international community to respond to attacks on heritage with even more culture, more knowledge, and more dignity.

This calls for unity, patience, and the first thing is to assess the damages and proceed with order and a sense of responsibility.

The most recent decision by the UNESCO Executive Board on the protection and preservation of Palmyra and other Syrian World Heritage sites, adopted unanimously, bears witness to the power of Palmyra to bring the international community together.

This is not about stones and monuments - this is about who we are as human beings - it is about the history of an entire people.

Palmyra belongs to all Syrians - and UNESCO never delinks the protection of heritage from the protection of human lives and humanitarian emergencies.

Today, in this museum, we reaffirm this principle.

The Kunsthistorisches Museum is a symbol of artistic achievement – it testifies also to the role of culture in fostering social cohesion, bringing a people together around a sense of a shared destiny.

This is the message we need to send today.

Today, in Iraq, in Syria, and also in Libya, we see the rise of violent extremism, with culture and identities on the front line of new wars.

We see the systematic violations of human rights, the persecution of people on cultural and religious grounds.

We see the intentional destruction of the past, with cultural landmarks bulldozed, in Palmyra and Mosul, in Bosra and Aleppo.

We see archaeological sites looted on industrial scale, in Douras Europos, in Apamea, fuelling illicit trafficking, financing terrorism.

In the ancient Iraqi city of Nineveh, historical gates of Mesqa and Adad, were violently struck a week ago.

In Libya, since the outburst of widespread fighting in July 2014, we have seen deliberate vandalism, destruction of cultural property, deliberate damages on the Shrine of Sheikh Ahmed Mirgani.

At least eight religious sites were damaged or destroyed in the old town of Tripoli and its surroundings in 2014 and 2015.

Fundamentally, I believe we are seeing a new global struggle for hearts and minds... especially *young* hearts and minds.

Violent extremists target world heritage sites in a strategy to attack humanity as a whole.

This is why this issues goes well beyond any specific country – and recent terrorist attacks have shown that violence knows no borders: all States are concerned, and we must respond together.

It is in this spirit that UNESCO is working to protect cultural heritage in Libya.

UNESCO assisted in the physical rehabilitation of the Bani Walid Museum, which since 2011 had suffered great damage.

UNESCO helped reconstruct the storage facilities at the World Heritage site of Cyrene, where cultural objects were excavated by looters in 2011, and partially destroyed in 2013.

Over the last two years in Libya, with the support of Italy, UNESCO has helped train hundreds of conservators and technicians in preventive conservation, museum management, inventories.

We work with UNOSAT, to assess damages on world heritage sites via satellite imagery, In Cyrene, in Leptis Magna, in Sabratha.

On 9-11 May, in Tunis, UNESCO and ICCROM, with the support of the US Embassy in Libya, and with relevant Libyan institutions, will host an international expert meeting to coordinate all efforts for the protection of Libyan Heritage.

We need to do much more.

We need to talk to young people, we need to explain the meaning of Heritage, the human values it carries, we need to win this battle of ideas.

Heritage is an open book on our cultural diversity: it is a guide through the many layers of civilisations we all come from.

Archaeological sites like Palmyra are crossroads of civilisations: they tell the stories of exchanges between east and west, between the Mediterranean and the Persian empire.

Heritage reminds us there is no pure culture – we are all connected as culture permeates and influence each other.

Palmyra stood for everything the extremists abhor, and this is the message they wanted to destroy.

They will fail, because history cannot be silenced.

This is the meaning of UNESCO #United4Heritage campaign, mobilising youth, historians, archaeologists and scholars to respond to those who seek to destroy and hijack history.

You have seen on the screens images of this global movement.

We have seen ordinary citizens and government officials from across the globe express support, share expertise and ideas.

In this respect, I wish to commend the longstanding commitment of Austria with UNESCO in the response to such challenges.

Austria is a co-sponsor to UNESCO's programme on emergency measures to protect Syrian heritage, supported by the European Union, to assess damages, to train professionals.

All across Austria, cultural professionals, curators and museum directors have started collecting tools, emergency safeguarding equipment, to be shipped via UNESCO to Syrian professionals.

We have led this effort already in France and Switzerland, and 7 tons of equipment have already been sent to Syrian colleagues, who sometimes risk their lives to protect heritage under attack.

Austria is leading the global debate on these issues, sharing knowledge and bringing experts together.

Austria hosts the *11th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, taking place as we speak, at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Austria also gave its helping hand to ICOM Emergency Red List of Egyptian Cultural Objects at Risk and to the launch of ICOM Red List for Libya in German.

Over the last 15 years, the ICOM Red Lists have considerably renewed the way we fight against illicit trafficking.

And UNESCO is determined to continue working with ICOM to end this plague.

It sends a powerful message of shared responsibility.

It sends also a strong signal about the importance of culture in modern conflicts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The protection of culture is much more than a cultural issue.

It is a humanitarian imperative and a security issue.

It is also a recovery issue, giving people strength and confidence.

This is why UNESCO is exploring every way to strengthen the linkages between peacebuilding operations, humanitarian emergency responses and action for the protection of heritage.

This is the spirit of the agreement I just signed with the *International Committee for the Red Cross*.

This is the spirit of the UNESCO agreement with Italy, to establish a *Task Force on Unite4heritage*, bringing together military and culture experts, ready to intervene in crisis.

Connecting the dots between culture, security and emergency is what we are doing also in Mali.

Last July, I went to Timbuktu to celebrate the reconstruction of the 14 mausoleums destroyed by violent extremists in 2012 – and I am encouraged that the protection of cultural heritage is integrated in the mandate of MINUSMA peacekeeping operation.

This is the significance of the landmark Resolution 2199 by the United Nations Security Council, on the financing of terrorism, which bans trade in cultural goods from Syria.

We must do far more to boost coordination among Member States, law enforcement agencies, museums and auction houses, bringing all partners together well beyond the “culture box” - to build capacities, deepen information-sharing.

Although we are appalled by the loss of cultural heritage, it is important to realize that all these efforts are bearing fruit.

‘Blood antiquities’ have been seized in Finland, Jordan, Turkey, the United States, as well as the United Kingdom and Israel, where statues from Cyrene are being stored, waiting to be returned.

I remember the emotion and outrage of the museum community in March 2013, when two statue heads from the classical museum of Sabratha, a World Heritage site, were looted and damaged.

I also remember the determination of the modern “Monuments Men” who arrested the smugglers in June, and recovered the statues. UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture of Libya celebrated the return to the Museum on 20 June.

Only three years after they were levelled, the Mausoleums of Timbuktu rise again, as a symbol of the power of culture against hatred.

Of course, every situation is different, and what applies here may not be suitable elsewhere.

But everywhere heritage has its chance. Peace has its chance.

Here, in this beautiful hall, we chose to unite for heritage, we choose to believe in the power of culture to build peace, we choose culture over hatred, we choose knowledge over intolerance.

And I am deeply grateful for this.

Thank you.