



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

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

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

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 High Level Meeting on the implementation of UN
Security Council Resolution 2199 and the Safeguarding of Iraqi and Syrian
Heritage**

UNESCO, 1 April 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Welcome to UNESCO.

Let me start by thanking each of you for attending this High Level Meeting.

I am also under the impression of my recent visit to Bagdad, and this meeting is a direct follow up to discuss how we can better coordinate and better work together, in terms of awareness raising, information sharing and strengthening of legal frameworks.

We have high expectations for this meeting and we all share a great sense of responsibility.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 2199 on the financing of terrorism is a milestone in many respects – notably for safeguarding Iraqi and Syrian cultural heritage.

We all have different experiences and expertise, from many fields.

We are here to explore the best ways to combine forces to better protect heritage and put an end to the illicit trafficking of cultural objects.

For this, we must address a number of questions:

- What lessons can we learn from the implementation of the ban on trade of cultural objects from Iraq, in place since 2003?
- What should be the priorities to reinforce the effectiveness of such measures?
- What is the optimal division of labour – how can we better define who is doing what, including States and non-State actors, such as museums and cultural institutions?

Answering these questions calls, on the one hand, for a clear roadmap for actions among us, and, also, on the other hand, for strong guidelines and proposals to support our respective Member States that cannot act alone.

We have proposals on the table to consider, and we are here to share ideas and listen.

The stakes are high.

Violent extremists are showing fierce determination to destroy heritage, to vandalize culture, to attack museum visitors.

Our response must be even more determined.

This is why we have gathered today, bringing together all key partners for safeguarding humanity's shared heritage, to craft new ways to fight these crimes

Because the deliberate destruction of heritage is a war crime.

This destruction is compounded with the illicit trafficking of cultural objects, which together are used as weapons of war, to destabilize and oppress communities, to finance further criminal activities.

At UNESCO, I have stated clearly that such acts of cultural cleansing are not only a cultural tragedy but also a security issue.

I have alerted the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, as we did in the case of Mali, in order to open an investigation condemning the deliberate destruction of cultural heritage. I will meet with her next week, to further strengthen our cooperation.

In May 2014, UNESCO launched an *Emergency Action Plan for the Safeguarding of the Syrian Cultural Heritage* – this was followed by a similar Action Plan for Iraqi Heritage in July 2014.

We have seized every opportunity to rally all key partners -- including UNESCO Member States through a strong resolution at the last Executive Board, and again in December 2014, with a *High-Level International Conference on Cultural Heritage and Diversity at Risk in Syria and Iraq*.

These initiatives have helped to clarify the links between culture and security, paving the way also for the United Nations Security Council Resolution we have gathered to explore today.

Now, it is vital we consolidate the fight against the smuggling and trafficking of antiquities, first and foremost in Iraq and Syria, and I believe most of our work will also be relevant for what is happening currently in Yemen or Libya.

We need to design stronger coordination mechanisms, to accelerate the pace, as some objects have already appeared on the Internet through e-commerce websites.

Member States themselves will take strength in seeing our determination, in seeing concrete proposals.

The Resolution adopted on 12 February sets a clear agenda.

UNESCO, in close cooperation with INTERPOL and other international partners here today, has been asked explicitly to assist Member States in taking all appropriate steps to prevent the trade in Iraqi and Syrian cultural property that have been illegally removed from Iraq and from Syria.

I have informed the United Nations Secretary-General, Mr Ban Ki-moon, about UNESCO's initiative to convene this High Level Meeting in order to develop a powerful system-wide response. He is very interested in this meeting and following closely our discussions.

Last Saturday, in Baghdad, I launched a new global social media campaign, #unite4heritage, principally targeted at young women and men, to counter the rhetoric of violent extremism and the propaganda of hatred -- which I invite you all to join and share.

Our goal is to craft a counter-narrative to that of terrorists.

When violent extremists say humanity is not a single community that shares values, when they say world heritage doesn't exist, when they say pre-Islamic heritage is idolatry, when they say that diversity is dangerous -- we must respond.

We must respond by showing that exchange and dialogue between cultures is the driving force for all history.

I proposed to establish "protected cultural areas" around specific heritage sites -- Italy has made a proposal to create "blue helmets" for heritage -- we need to put forward concrete and actionable ideas.

So, to move forward, we should address future steps and think about how we can mobilize partners.

We want to launch a global coalition later this year, in June, and we'll have to call more countries to join our efforts.

In New York, there will be a meeting of the Security Council in the Aria format on 27 April, specifically on this subject, and I will be honoured to participate in close cooperation with Interpol.

In this spirit, I thank you again for your commitment to the goals we share.