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Organización
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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 protection and preservation of the cultural heritage of Syria and
Iraq**

Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution, 19 September 2014

Mr Harry Ettliger,

Mr Richard Kurin, Under Secretary for History, Art and Culture, Smithsonian Institution,

Ms Nancy Wilkie, President of the United States Committee of the Blue Shield,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we celebrate 60th anniversary of the 1954 *Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict*, culture is under attack in Syria, in Iraq, in Mali, in Libya.

We are witnessing a campaign of 'cultural cleansing' in Iraq, cultural persecution of minorities, and systematic looting and illicit trafficking to finance extremist groups.

This war against culture is not new – Mr Harry Ettliger has been eloquent about it – but we need to consider the needs of the 'monuments men and women' of today.

On 27 March, UNESCO held a special screening of "Monuments Men", with the US Mission, followed by a high level expert panel on illicit trafficking.

There have been steps forward thanks to UNESCO's 1970 *Convention against Illicit trafficking of Cultural Property* and the 1995 UNIDROIT Convention -- but there remains much to be done to educate the art market, to halt wrongful acquisitions.

This is why in 2003, with the support of the US State Department, UNESCO launched a global *Database of National Laws on Cultural Heritage* – providing complete information in case of a legal question about the origin of an object.

On Iraq, UNESCO has organized several experts meetings, bringing together ICCROM, ICOMOS, ICOM, Interpol, the Customs Organization. We have launched, on the 17th of July, an *Emergency Response Action Plan*, starting with the creation of an online observatory.

UNESCO will host another expert meeting on 29 September, at the initiative of France and Iraq.

We have immediately shared coordinates of major cultural heritage sites with the United States, when in early August the US announced its intention to carry out air strikes in Iraq.

I have sent letters to all ministers of foreign affairs of all neighbouring countries, State Parties and non-state parties to the 1970 Convention, as well as customs agencies, museums and auction houses, calling for heightened vigilance and control, in cooperation with the Iraqi delegation.

On June 17, July 28, August 8, I have made statements to raise awareness on the importance to protect culture, for instance the Citadel of Erbil, just inscribed on the world Heritage list.

In Syria, with support from the European Union and the Flemish Government of Belgium, we are working with all partners to create a monitoring mechanism to assess the state of heritage.

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

In Mali, UNESCO is now rebuilding the 14 destroyed mausoleums, in partnership with local communities.

This is our response to extremism and ignorance.

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

We need to ring the bell louder, to ensure respect of the 1954 Hague Convention, and we work with the International Criminal Court in Mali to bring those responsible of destructions to justice.

Our biggest enemy may be the false pretext that in emergencies, one should leave culture aside.

Attacks against culture are attacks against people, and this is why protecting heritage must be an integral part of all peacebuilding efforts, to safeguard a heritage of diversity and tolerance – to prepare the ground for reconciliation.

A new type of global consciousness is emerging across the world.

Cultural heritage carries values, a message, and a story.

It is the collective story of humanity as a whole.

Globalization has brought a very different perspective about cultural heritage across the world – the revolutionary concept of world heritage is even more relevant today and carries a stronger meaning when we witness the impact of destruction nowadays.

Building this global consciousness is the responsibility we have to take collectively today as a response against extremism.

In this spirit, I thank all our partners here today for their commitment -- including the Smithsonian Institution, our host, the United States Department of State, the Metropolitan Museum, and the United States Committee of the Blue Shield.