



UNITED NATIONS YEAR FOR CULTURAL HERITAGE
ANNÉE DES NATIONS UNIES POUR LE PATRIMOINE CULTUREL
AÑO DE LAS NACIONES UNIDAS DEL PATRIMONIO CULTURAL
سنة الأمم المتحدة للتراث الثقافي
ГОД КУЛЬТУРНОГО НАСЛЕДИЯ ОРГАНИЗАЦИИ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ НАЦИЙ
联合国文化遗产年

Message by the Director-General of UNESCO

Above the door of the Kabul Museum, ravaged by more than 20 years of warfare, this maxim was posted up by persons unknown a few days ago: “A nation is alive when its culture is alive”. This symbolic gesture gives a deeper meaning to the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 21 November 2001 proclaiming 2002 “United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage”.

The cultural heritage of a people is the memory of its living culture. It is expressed in many different forms, both tangible (monuments, landscapes, objects) and intangible (languages, know-how, the performing arts, music, etc.). The origins of this heritage are multifarious, too. In retracing its own cultural lineage, in recognizing the many different influences that have marked its history and shaped its identity, a people is better able to build peaceful relations with other peoples, to pursue what is often an age-old dialogue and to forge its future.

To value the cultural heritage and to care for it as a treasure bequeathed to us by our ancestors that it is our duty to transmit as wholly as possible to our children, is a sign of wisdom. That is why we must pursue our standard-setting action and design instruments like the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, whose thirtieth anniversary is being celebrated this year, able to give effective protection to all cultural heritage.

Today, the biggest challenge facing UNESCO, designated lead agency for this Year by the United Nations, is to make the public authorities, the private sector and civil society as a whole realize that the cultural heritage is not only an instrument for peace and reconciliation but also a factor of development. There are numerous examples in which a new approach to the management of the cultural heritage has promoted economic growth by creating employment opportunities for local populations, whether through crafts, cultural tourism and the emergence of new trades or through new forms of activity.

We must therefore encourage each member of society to become actively involved in the conservation and enhancement of the heritage of humanity. It is through the heightening of public awareness and increased mobilization and action in favour of heritage values, involving young people in particular, that the year 2002, United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage, will acquire its full significance.

Hence the importance of associating cultural heritage with development policies and also the importance of demonstrating, as in the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Caucasus and Cambodia, how much this powerful symbol of a people's identity can become a unifying factor for national reconciliation – provided, that is, it is revitalized in people's minds not only as the mark of a common acknowledged past but also as the foundation of a shared future.