

Address

by

**His Excellency
Ambassador Musa bin Jaafar bin Hassan,
President of the General Conference of UNESCO,
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the Conference of Parties to the Convention
on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions**

**First session – Paris
UNESCO, 18-20 June 2007**

Your Excellency Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General,
Your Excellency Mr Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former Secretary-General of the United Nations,
Mr Kader Asmal, Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts on the Preliminary
Draft Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic
Expressions,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I shall start by recalling the words of the Egyptian writer Ahmed Abbas Saleh:

“There is no culture in this human life which is above being influenced by other cultures.”

Scientific studies have taught us that human beings of long ago, trying to protect themselves from the harshness of life and the manifold dangers threatening them, created for themselves a culture which was in harmony with the environment in which they lived, and invented tools for use in their daily lives.

Thus was culture born alongside development, and it affected people’s social behaviour. As knowledge spread, so cultures spread from one region to another. Calls were heard to resist the culture coming from beyond the frontiers as a result of the recession of the traditional cultures of most peoples caused by the tremendous flood of visual and written information.

Hence the importance of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. You are meeting today in the first session of the Conference of Parties to the Convention. As I welcome you all, I must commend the role of UNESCO, its Director-General, Koïchiro Matsuura, and his colleagues in the excellent preparation of this important conference, and congratulate the distinguished Minister, Kader Asmal, thanks to whose rigour, dynamism and skilled stewardship of the meeting of experts, together with the cooperation of all the Members of the Organization, the results of this painstaking work saw the light of day in the form of this harvest we are gathering together today to reap. What is important is to build partnerships and capacities with the help of civil society in order to raise awareness within groups and communities, and to disseminate them and use them with whatever means and technologies may be necessary.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The Convention recognizes that cultural activities, expertise and services cannot be reduced to their economic dimension alone. Rather, account must be taken of their cultural weight. Diversity is a prerequisite for the meeting of cultures and for ensuring exchange among them. Every culture has found a space for expression and an environment conducive to the sharing of the expressions of the other cultures available today as a result of globalization. The change currently under way to peoples' customs and cultures is taking place within a short period of time, compared with what used to happen, because of information and communication technology. This should be seen as an opportunity for interaction and enrichment rather than a challenge or threat to diversity.

Cultural trends and products impose themselves upon us and on future generations whether we like it or not, and customs and tastes can be contradictory even within a single family. There is no good reason to see the successful strategy as consisting in resisting the dangers of incoming cultures and declaring war on them because that might deprive us of the pleasure of enjoying cultural diversity.

The Brazilian novelist, Paulo Coelho, said: "Although I already have a story to tell my grandchildren, if I have ever any, whoever lives off past successes has lost the meaning of life."

Distinguished participants,

We are living in the era of globalization, and you are all well aware that the spread of globalization and the emergence of a new culture has influenced broad sections of young people in every single part of the world.

Although this new culture has come to shape new behaviour among modern generations through film, television, electronic games and the Internet, at the same time, it is not going so far as to affect religious and intellectual convictions. It cannot be compared with a culture which used to have spiritual affiliations.

The former Secretary-General of the United Nations, Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, President of the UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development, to whom I extend my heartfelt thanks for being here with us, referred in the Commission's report to awareness of "each people's own way of life as a value, as a right, as a responsibility and as an opportunity". The Commission also mentioned the rapid development and unimpeded flow of new media technologies across national borders, and called for a global debate to create a better understanding and coordination of national efforts. It has become necessary to move from a stage of confrontation between two cultures to cultural communication which draws its strength from tolerance in order to consolidate globalization in its ethical foundations and within a framework of respect for diversity. The American writer, Thomas L. Friedman, said in that connection that "Globalization 1.0 and 2.0 were driven primarily by European and American companies and countries ... In Globalization 3.0, you are going to see every colour of the human rainbow take part".

Ladies and gentlemen,

Weighty responsibilities lie upon this, the first session of your Conference. All the Member States of UNESCO are watching you and following your debates and the positive outcomes that you will achieve, which should prompt numerous States to ratify the Convention in order to open up new fields for human creativity in a world which is rich in diversity. We need to adopt new positions that go beyond narrow particularisms in order to highlight at the very heart of diversity signs of inclusiveness and universality. As Claude Lévi-Strauss said, "Culture is behind us, around

us and before us”. Dialogue in itself means pluralism in culture and heritage. Ignorance, on the other hand, ignorance of the Other’s way of life, values, language, history and heritage is the greatest obstacle to dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Part of our creative diversity is a poem by an unknown poet from Viet Nam, which sings the praises of two national heroines of his country:

“Their hair is like clouds
Their body like snow
Their skin like ivory
Their appearance is open like fog
Two beautiful flowers, butterflies dare not approach them and neither does the bee
They are talented in the art of writing
They are as beautiful as the moon goddess, Hang Nga.”

And the Chilean poet, Pablo Neruda, said:

“To all those I do not know
To those who live on the banks of our rivers
And on the slopes of the volcanoes
To the hunters and peasants
To the blue Indians living on the shores of lakes.
Radiant as the queen
I belong to you all ...
And I recognize you”

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, are some words by the writer Gibran Khalil Gibran: “the deepest and strongest feeling in the human heart is that to which you surrender, and in so doing find delight, rest and tranquillity”.

I wish you success and serenity.