Message from Ms Audrey Azoulay, Director-General of UNESCO, on the occasion of International Day of Islamic Art

18 November

This International Day of Islamic Art was proclaimed in order to celebrate together this exceptional heritage, spanning fourteen centuries, which continues to renew and reinvent itself, and influence cultures around the world.

Let this Day be an opportunity to all share wonderment over this art which is deeply rooted its rich spirituality and which expresses a certain way of seeing, feeling and understanding the world.

Islamic art is also rich in its variety, techniques and forms, as well as in time and space. To engage with Islamic art is to discover a history made up of exchanges, contacts and influences, from Europe to Africa and from the Mediterranean basin to the Indian Ocean.

This profoundly global and intercultural history deserves to be better known, as does the language that is so often its vector. That is why UNESCO has worked for almost 40 years, within the framework of its general and regional history projects, to enrich the collection "The Different Aspects of Islamic Culture", which shows the full richness and complexity of the Islamic arts.

This history, rich in tradition, merges with the present. All over the world, artists continue to keep it alive today through the tradition of Islamic art, perpetuating it, relating to it and renewing it. In doing so, they integrate it into new media and bring it to new audiences, enriching it with new dialogues.
At a time of destructive inward-looking attitudes and extremism that are affecting and damaging Muslims as they are the rest of the world's population, UNESCO wishes to recall the fundamental belief that in order to understand and know a culture, both in the wealth of its past and in the vitality of its present, we need to appreciate it in its universality.

Thus, on this first International Day of Islamic Art, UNESCO invites you to discover these exceptional arts, artists and artworks in the hope that this will concretely contribute towards peace and mutual understanding of humanity.