

Message by the Director-General of UNESCO

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The topic that gathers you today to this joint meeting of the 19th Forum of Ministers of Culture and Officials in charge of Culture, and the first meeting of Ministers of Culture of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, couldn't be more timely: the contribution of culture to sustainable development.

The year 2015 is approaching. As you know, the international community, through the United Nations System, adopted in 2000 the well-known Millennium Development Goals, the MDG, to be achieved in 2015.

We know today that it will be impossible to achieve those goals because, for a great extent, the programmes, strategies and development policies adopted at the time were not sufficient, or had not been defined appropriately.

Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations, underscored recently that 'we cannot continue to burn and consume our way to prosperity', and remarked that 'the old economic model is breaking down'.

Therefore, when those objectives are revised in 2015 and converted into the Sustainable Development Goals, we will have to include what was not included there before.

In this sense, allow me to underscore that culture was not included in the Millennium Development Goals. It was neither included as an indicator because, as it was said at the time, it is difficult to measure its impact in development.

I sincerely believe that one of the reasons of our failure in achieving the Millennium Development Goals is that we did not explicitly recognize, in the year 2000, the role culture plays in economic growth, in resources management, in conflict resolution, in addressing social inequities or in reaffirming identities.

We did not understand either that culture is an extremely efficient way to transfer knowledge. As such, it is the basis of innovation and creation, including scientific creation.

It might be that, at the time, we ignored that we cannot apply one single development model to all cultures; instead, cultures themselves should have determined their most suitable ways to prosperity.

At the end, maybe, we forgot that recognizing, valuing and sharing culture –the cultures of each of us and of our diverse societies, is the necessary step to reduce social inequities and allow full integration in society.

It is, therefore, very timely to remind that the production and consumption of cultural goods, services and activities have an economic, and social value.

That value is also embedded in the knowledge that we share through the exchange of symbols; symbols that we understand, we make our own and we transform, allowing us to innovate and create.

It is embedded in those shared symbols, which give us a sense of collective belonging and identity, leading to the social cohesion necessary to establish personal, professional or trade relations.

Moreover, the understanding of the symbols used by other collectivities, through intercultural exchange, allows us to establish relations beyond our own social groups, and, therefore, acquire additional knowledge.

It allows us to solve conflicts, and start dialogues that widen our horizon.

Yes, the theme of this meeting of Ministers of Culture of Latin America and the Caribbean is very timely.

From now on, until 2015, the international community will discuss old and new development objectives, and the strategies and policies that should be applied to achieve them.

It is the great opportunity for culture to be recognised, finally, as a pillar of development, together with the economic, social and environmental dimensions of prosperity and human well-being. That is, culture as an economic sector, as a vehicle of knowledge and identities, as foundation of the quality of life, and as instrument of social cohesion, conflict resolution and reduction of inequalities.

The inclusion of culture cannot be seen as a soft issue, or a way to silence critical voices: the continuous recreation of culture and its transmission is what defines us as human beings.

Can development be sustainable if the full potential of cultural resources is not used?

No.

Cultural Diversity is as necessary for sustainable development as biodiversity. If cultural diversity is reduced, or intercultural exchange among societies is limited, cultural resources would be destroyed. These resources, unlike the natural ones, are unlimited, since we, the people, are the source.

It is true that we need to continue developing, and applying, international policies to protect the natural environment, thus allowing sustainable development. That means a development model that does not endanger the availability of natural resources in the future.

It is also true that we do not pay the same attention to the drafting and implementation of policies that protect and promote the use of cultural resources to allow sustainable development. In spite of their abundance, such resources are not yet considered essential for growth.

This omission is astonishing. It seems evident that, the more cultural resources we have, the bigger the source of knowledge will be for innovating, producing goods and

services, enhance dialogue and social cohesion, and reduce conflict, thus allowing development.

Therefore, development models that do not recognise that the diversity of cultures and the relations among them are the source of knowledge, of economic growth, quality of life and social cohesion, cannot be sustainable.

And if we talk about the concept of sustainability, we should also talk about the meaning of development.

What do we mean with sustainable development?

With no hesitation, we refer to human-based development that aims at improving the quality of life; human development that includes the reduction of poverty and social inequalities through balanced economic growth; economic growth that is not led by the rule of the strongest, and which permits the efficient use of all resources, both natural and cultural.

That is our challenge at the debates on the revision of the MDG: we have to make sure that, thanks to culture, development models become more human to reflect our real needs as citizens.

As I had the opportunity to remark in New York, in September last year, culture is what we are, it is what makes us human, it is what gives us energy. It is a wellspring of innovation and creativity, the answer to many challenges.

The question we must face is how to integrate culture at the heart of the global agenda.

Let me, in this sense, seek your support to obtain, at the next meeting of the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations –to be held in Geneva in July of this year, that the value of culture is recognized as an essential pillar of human development and economic growth, and of reducing poverty and inequality. Currently, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico and Nicaragua are members of ECOSOC.

I assure you that UNESCO will be on your side, supporting your national, sub-regional and regional initiatives to accomplish fair and balanced growth, -growth based on our shared human values.

We will continue providing our support to the meetings of Ministers of Culture of the Region, -a support that we have provided since 1989, when the first Forum of Ministers was convened, and that we have strengthened over the years through the establishment of the Technical Secretariat of the Forum in our Regional Office for Culture, the setting up and maintenance of the Portal of Culture of Latin America and the Caribbean, which is the oldest project of the Forum, and through our cooperation in many projects of the Forum;

UNESCO has always supported, and will continue to do so, regional integration, cooperation among its Member States, and the definition of common goals within the context of regional diversity.

I do not therefore wish to conclude my intervention without expressing my personal and institutional congratulations, on behalf of UNESCO, to all of you, as this is the first time that the Ministers of Culture of Latin America and the Caribbean meet under the auspices of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States, CELAC.

I consider it a great success that since the beginning of its activities, the CELAC has awarded a major place to Culture, giving it the priority it deserves in its work. This integration mechanism would be incomplete without Culture. UNESCO is therefore very pleased to contribute to your work since these very first formal discussions.

I therefore welcome this joint meeting of the 19th Forum of Ministers of Culture, and of the first meeting of Ministers of Culture of the CELAC, and wish you every success in your work.

Thank you.