

12 June 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Opening of the Thematic Debate on Culture and Development**

Mr. Secretary-General,
Madam Director-General,
Mr. High Representative,
Madam Administrator,
Esteemed Ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am truly honored to welcome you to the General Assembly's thematic debate on Culture and Development, which we have organized in partnership with UNESCO.

For many years, they have stood at the forefront of UN's efforts to promote culture as both an enabler and driver of development. I believe their current endeavors are of paramount importance for the conceiving and eventual carrying out of post-2015 agenda. I am truly grateful for Director-General Bokova's engagement and dedication in this regard.

Allow me to extend special recognition to my predecessor as PGA, my good friend Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser. In his capacity as High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations, he has worked very hard to incorporate culture into the UN's development policies and strategies, as called for in resolution 66/208, adopted during his GA presidency.

I would also like to express my appreciation to UNDP Administrator Helen Clark for her participation in today's debate. I believe we will greatly benefit from her wealth of knowledge and experience.

Last but not least, permit me to emphasize Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's leadership in advancing the post-2015 agenda—including its cultural component.

Excellencies,

Our increasingly globalized and interdependent world is beset by one of the most profound, all-encompassing periods of transformation ever to occur in peacetime.

We are in the midst of an unprecedented pivot towards a more democratized system of international relations, in which countries aspire to greater empowerment and freedom of action. This calls for a

grand re-organization of human affairs, in which the importance of how cultures and civilizations communicate and intertwine will grow stronger over time.

Last June, world leaders came together in Rio de Janeiro to adopt the historic “Future We Want” document.

For the first time in history, Member States agreed to comprehensively integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development—namely economic, social, and environmental—into a single, fully coherent whole.

In Rio, the General Assembly received additional mandates. In essence, it was given the strategic task of crafting a new, ambitious universal framework that will define much of the UN’s work for decades to come.

The General Assembly has under one thousand days to carry out these assignments. They include conceiving and adopting the SDGs; designing options for financing them; and creating a workable arrangement for monitoring their implementation.

The Rio conclusions also emphasized the importance of promoting the world’s diversity, acknowledging that “people are at the center of sustainable development,” to which “all cultures and civilizations can contribute.” It also underscored the imperative of respecting “different national circumstances” in moving towards a common end point.

On this basis, the UN System Task Team convened by the Secretary-General has concluded that all “communities and individuals must be able to [...] practice their own culture and enjoy that of others free from fear. This will include, inter alia, [...] safeguarding cultural and natural heritage, fostering cultural institutions, strengthening cultural and creative institutions, and promoting cultural tourism.”

Notwithstanding these important points of reference, I believe that the significance of the nexus between culture and development for the post-2015 agenda is not yet fully grasped.

I hope our discussions will contribute to a reassessment of its meaning to our generational task.

Excellencies,

I am afraid we are not moving forward with the adequate dynamism that is required if we are to meet the envisaged deadlines.

I once again extend an appeal for urgency, and respectfully call on Member States to make the post-2015 agenda their utmost priority. Its full implementation, in my view, may help draw the world’s cultures closer together, enabling them to grow increasingly secure with each other.

I believe that cultural interaction is first and foremost about dialogue. The human capacity to communicate—to share thoughts and convictions in an orderly and meaningful way—is what opens the possibility for diverse communities to achieve concord on the basis of mutual respect.

This is a basic tenet of not only the post-2015 agenda, but the UN Charter itself. It has been actively championed by UNESCO throughout its existence, starting with its first Director-General, Sir Julian Sorell Huxley. Upon being asked to define the parameters of progress, he stated that fulfilling humanity's potential meant directing its “[cultural] diversity away from competitive discord to harmonious symphony.”

I can think of fewer better ways to define our assignments: to produce a harmonious symphony of mankind, through the achievement of a universal transition to sustainability.

Excellencies,

The basis of the word culture is the Latin *cultura*. Originally, it was an agricultural term—used to describe the cultivation of the soil and the enjoyment of what it produced. It thus signified taking care of the earth, by improving it through human ingenuity and responsible stewardship.

Today, it chiefly refers to the sum of a community's intellectual and artistic achievements—a symbolic bridge that maintains continuity between the past, present and future. A great 20th century philosopher defined culture as improving and refining our natural faculties, enabling us to experience more fully the endowments conceived by the human mind.

He also reminded us that our ambition to constantly strive for material prosperity must be informed by a greater respect for traditions—both our own and everyone else's. Without this, we run the danger of not only neglecting our roots, but denigrating those of others.

We stand on the shoulders of those who came before us, and who helped make our cultures what they are today. Those famous or anonymous heroes of yesterday deserve our sustained respect. They attach personality to the building blocks with which we constructed our most cherished edifices, the alphabets we used to write our chronicles, and the songs we sang of our dreams and sacrifices.

Excellencies,

Intercultural dialogue conducted within the framework of the post-2015 agenda represents, in my view, the surest way to guard against the erasing hand of uniformity, which some fear could be a consequence of globalization.

Fully embracing the potential of this nexus will also help promote a greater sense of indivisibility and mutual belonging—a feeling that no community or nation can fulfill its potential until it is accompanied by the advancement of the entire mankind.

In the discussions that have taken place over the past few months, we have so far been unable to reach consensus on how to build on the agreed foundations of sustainable development.

The gap between means and ends has yet to be bridged—in my view, partly because the cultural component has largely been absent from our discussions.

I believe that creating solid and durable bridges between humanity's cultures will help overcome many of the differences which manifestly stand in the way of moving decisively forward—as one diverse, yet unified family of nations—in the quest to achieve universal sustainability.

The 1961 Nobel Laureate in Literature, Ivo Andric, wrote that nothing that man erected or built in his “urge for living” was more valuable than bridges. For him, they facilitate togetherness, and like nothing else, they attach and bind peoples, cultures, and nations.

Allow me to summarize the message I have tried to convey today than by concluding my remarks with a passage from his magnum opus, the *Bridge on the Drina*.

“Belonging to everyone and being equal for everyone, useful, always built with a sense [of purpose], on the spot where most human needs are crossing, [...] bridges do not serve for anything secret and bad. [...] What we aim for,” he concluded, “will be granted its true meaning on the other side, for bridges represent the eternal unsatisfied human desire to link, to reconcile and join all that springs up before our spirit and our eyes, so that there should be no divisions, no confrontation, and no parting.”

May this thematic debate lead to new bridges being built, and so foster a better understanding between nations on the critical issues we must come together to resolve—for the benefit of all mankind.

Thank you very much for your attention.