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UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

**Speech
by**

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**On the occasion of the Intergovernmental meeting of Experts on the
Preliminary Draft Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural
Contents and Artistic Expressions**

**UNESCO Headquarters
Paris-France**

Chairman of the Executive Board, Ambassador Hans-Heinrich Wrede:

Director General, Mr Koïcihro Matsuura

Your Excellencies, Ambassadors and Permanent Delegates

Eminent Experts

Representatives of the Intergovernmental Experts

Representatives of the Advisory Group

Representatives of the Civil Society,

Distinguished participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Brothers and Sisters.

Dear Friends and colleagues

I consider it a great privilege to welcome you all to the opening of the first intergovernmental meeting of experts on the Preliminary Draft Convention on the Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Contents and Artistic Expressions.

When the General Conference adopted at its 32nd session Resolution 34, inviting the Director-General to submit at its 33rd session the “draft of the convention on cultural diversity” concerning the protection of the diversity of cultural contents and artistic expression, it took a step, a momentous step towards the furtherance of one of the ideas that were at the foundation of UNESCO.

The work ahead of you is most challenging and will no doubt call for all the skill and dexterity you can master in trying to fashion-out a text universally accepted and efficient for meeting the expectation of the international community.

If you succeed, or should I say if we succeed in our work for the preparation and finalization of this particular convention we would have knocked-in one of the final nails in the coffin of “that ignorance of each other’s ways and lives that have been a common cause throughout the history of mankind and that suspicion and mistrust between peoples of the world through which their differences have all-too-often broken into war”.

You might justifiably call the above, echoes from our constitution. You will indeed be right if you do but we only have to look around us today to realize

how very topical it still is: we are still battered by ignorance and suspicion in our dealing one with another.

The importance of the responsibility given to UNESCO for the preparation of this convention therefore, stares us in the face as we note how far we still are from the attainment of the ideals that nurtured the creation of our organization.

But we have cause for hope. For we can recognize the evolution of international thinking from the old consideration of cultural difference as excuses for lack of tolerance and even conflict, to the situation today, where we have come to assume our differences and to embrace the richness which gave meaning to our diversity.

Your work on behalf of UNESCO is to move resolutely forward this evolution.

It gratifying to note all the preparatory work under the impulsion of the Director-General: and I would like to congratulate all those who have participated in the enterprise so far.

As I look round this room I am particularly delighted by the top level representation of Member States, which to me is a firm indication of the high quality of the expectation of the member states from the process which began immediately after the end of the last General Conference and which you are now called upon to carry forward. The world looks upon the organisation to perform one of the key functions given to it by the world community and I am sure we are equal to the task.

The first Director General of UNESCO once argued that the organisation would always receive the needed cooperation “once the nations realize that UNESCO believes firmly in maintaining the fullest diversity and variety of cultures” among other considerations. This position on the preservation of cultural diversity was supported by several delegates at the first session of the General Conference in November 1946. On that occasion Professor Jaroslav Stransky of Czechoslovakia observed in his intervention that “UNESCO represents a great and fine ideal of cultural unity”. In a similar way, the delegate from Brazil observed that “the treasures which we intend safeguarding and augmenting are the collective patrimony of humanity, the fruit of its creative genius, or the anonymous contribution of past generations”

As you start your deliberation, please allow me to conclude with an advice from history; the advice given in a statement made on the morning of Friday 22 November 1946 by Mr D. R. Hardman, the head of the U.K delegation at the fifth plenary meeting of the first session of the General Conference of UNESCO. He said: “we must be international and we must keep our nationalism where it belongs”. We must see to it that in our proper pride in our own culture we do not impose on the world one way of life. The white radiance of universal enlightenment includes in its spectrum colours from the cultures of every race and nation. By constructive and practical means we may do more to buttress the

defences against war and create genuine peace in the one world, to increase the real spiritual, intellectual and material welfare of mankind... let us be as boldly imaginative as the artist as scrupulously objective as the scientist as sympathetic and devoted as the teacher; let us above all keep that faith in the ordinary man which is the essence of democracy ... but though we work hopefully we must realize that time is short.

I wish you every success in the challenging task before you

I thank you for your attention and God bless you.