Plenary I: Opening Ceremony

SPEECHES

Master of Ceremony:  **Marielza Oliveira** (Brazil), Director of the UNESCO Office in Beijing

Speakers:

- **Francesco Bandarin**, Assistant Director-General for Culture, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)
- **Zhao Yide** (China), Member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China Zhejiang Provincial Committee and Secretary of Hangzhou Municipal Party Committee
- **Zhang Jianting** (China), Vice Mayor of Hangzhou
- **Zhang Xiuqin** (China), Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the People’s Republic of China to UNESCO
- **Kumaresh Misra**, Deputy Secretary-General of Habitat III
Address by Mr Francesco Bandarin,
Assistant Director General for Culture,
on the occasion of the International Conference on
“Culture for Sustainable Cities”
Hangzhou, People’s Republic of China, 10 December 2015

At the outset, I would like to thank you all on behalf of the Director-General of UNESCO for joining us today at the International Conference on “Culture and Sustainable Cities”.

I am very glad to be here, once again in the city of Hangzhou. A city that has now, for the second time, provided a stage for the role of culture for sustainable development, and more particularly sustainable urban development, to be explored, discussed and furthered to ensure, not only its integration in the international development agenda back in 2013 but also its implementation from this year onwards.

Today, bears witness to UNESCO and Hangzhou’s long-standing partnership, which has forged an inspiring and innovative framework to help place culture at the core of the international community’s actions.

In this light, I wish to congratulate and thank the Municipal People’s Government of Hangzhou, as well as the National Commission of the People’s Republic of China for their generous support in hosting and co-organizing this International Conference.

I would like to thank in particular, Mr Xi Qin Hua, Secretary-General of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China Hangzhou Municipal Party Committee, Mr Zhang Jianting, Vice Mayor of Hangzhou, Mr Zhao Yide, Member of the Standing Committee of the Communist Party of China Zhejiang Provincial Committee and Secretary of the Hangzhou Municipal Party Committee, for making these meetings possible, and for supporting the elaboration of the UNESCO Global Report on Culture and Sustainable Urban Development, foreseeing the positioning of this city as a key UNESCO partner and main player in the “New Urban Agenda”.
This Conference is the result of the objectives we have pursued for the past five years. Half a decade ago, we embarked on this cooperation with the City of Hangzhou. In 2013, we drew together the broad expertise and influence of governmental representatives and decision makers worldwide in order to promote the recognition of culture in the context of post-2015 negotiations on sustainable development. The Conference in 2013 culminated in the adoption of the Hangzhou Declaration, which is reflected, since September last, in the 2030 Agenda for Culture and Sustainable Development.

Culture is now present in many Sustainable Development Goals, including the goals to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns and to promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development. However, it is primarily addressed in Goal 11 on cities and human settlements, notably through Target 11.4 on strengthening efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage.

This is the reason for which this Conference is being organized, to explore the prominent role of culture in the urban context. And this is also why we are devoted to building the urban agenda for culture and implementing policies in view of Habitat III.

The Habitat III Conference in Quito next year has summoned the important change in paradigm in the urban context of the 21st Century. For the first time culture is represented in the new agenda, paving the way for future prospects involving not only heritage but also creativity and the cultural industries.

It is needless to say that we are not working on a blank canvas. Cities, as actors of culture, have centuries of experience in delineating the cultural component in urban planning. Yet, it is now time to increase the visibility of this critical aspect.

Thanks to the generous support of Hangzhou, we have engaged in the elaboration of a Global Report on Culture and Sustainable Urban Development, which aims to offer an assessment of the situation of cities’ conservation.
This Report will provide a general framework of global policies in this field and showcase concrete prospective efforts.

I invite you all to look towards the future and face the complexities that cities will face in the forthcoming decades. The Habitat III process will present an opportunity to address the key challenges that are affecting our world today, notably the issue of heritage conservation, gentrification, migration, economic transitions and the growth of tourism, environmental protection.

Cities are undergoing a critical period, we are experiencing a time of fragility. If we want to maintain the cradle of identities and values that our urban environment represents, we need to address these paramount issues at both a local and international level.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is in this context that we must position culture at the dire heart of the discussions in Habitat III next autumn, and for this we will need local support.

Every city should strengthen their emphasis on local activities and heritage. Our host city of Hangzhou serves as a prime example in this regard, through its efforts to safeguard and promote the West lake Cultural Landscape and the Grand Canal World Heritage Sites, and to build on culture and creativity to craft a sustainable path to development.

A new awareness has been awoken among governments, it is thus time to address the uniqueness of this fragile dimension and draw on the conclusions of this Conference to provide concise and action-oriented recommendations for the next few decades, embodied in the Hangzhou Outcomes.
Speech at the opening of the UNESCO International Conference on “Culture for Sustainable Cities”

Zhang Xiuqin
Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of China to UNESCO
Hangzhou, December 10, 2015

Your Excellencies,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Friends,

It’s a pleasure and honor to attend this conference in the City of Hangzhou, to participate in the discussion of Culture for Sustainable Cities, at the beginning of the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Many countries in the world are undergoing rapid urbanization. The proportion of the world’s urban population has increased from around 2% of humanity at the beginning of the 19th Century, to around 50% at the beginning of the 21st Century, and will reach 70% by the year 2050. Parallel to this expansion of cities are the haunting problems of urban poverty, high crime rate, environmental pollution and rupture of cultural tradition. The recent terrorist attacks in Paris are a brutal demonstration of how cities are becoming targets as well as habitat of strikes of terrorism. How to deal with the challenges in urban development and to find new ways of development to achieve sustainable urbanization needs urgent solution. Therefore, UNESCO’s Culture and Sustainable Urban Development Initiative, and its three pillars, including the UNESCO Global Report on Culture and Sustainable Urban Development, and the International Conference on Culture for Sustainable Cities, and the third United Nations conference on housing and sustainable urban development (Habitat III) are events of milestone significance.

The International Conference on Culture: key to sustainable development, jointly organized by UNESCO, the Chinese National Commission for UNESCO and the City of Hangzhou in May 2013, adopted the Hangzhou Declaration entitled Placing Culture at the Heart of Sustainable Development Policies. The Declaration points out that we should acknowledge the role of culture as a system of values and a resource and framework to build truly sustainable development. The Declaration also calls for “harnessing culture as a resource for achieving sustainable urban development and management”, stressing “a
vibrant cultural life and the quality of urban historic environment are key for achieving sustainable cities.” It recognizes culture-aware urban development policies, cultural infrastructure, culture-led redevelopment of urban areas, cultural and creative industries, heritage-based urban revitalization and sustainable tourism as instrumental to achieving sustainable urban development that promotes respect for diversity and dialogue, inclusiveness and social cohesion, creative expressions and green employment.

At this point, I’d like to pay tribute to the host city of this conference: the City of Hangzhou, which has a history of more than 2000 years and is well-known for the Liangzhu culture, silk culture, tea culture, and many tales handed down to become its cultural assets. The development of Hangzhou is a good example of integrating culture as a key tool for promoting sustainable urban development, by preserving urban, environmental and cultural identity, attracting activities and visitors, fostering the development of the creative economy and improvement of the quality of life.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Chinese government holds that promoting a culture of innovation is an important means of enhancing social vitality. Respect for differences, inclusiveness and diversity will encourage more people to participate in cultural innovation. Respect and promotion of harmony between different ethnic groups, and between man and nature, underline the importance of equality, dignity and sustainability. China vigorously promotes academic democracy and artistic freedom by creating a relaxed and harmonious cultural atmosphere, which helps bring forward the emergence of a generation of well-known contemporary Chinese artists and masterpieces. At the same time, China adheres to the policy of opening up to enhance cultural cooperation with other countries, promote dialogue, exchanges and mutual learning of civilizations, in order to safeguard world peace and harmony. China actively participates in international and regional cultural cooperation mechanisms, and deepens its collaboration with inter-governmental and international organizations, in particular with UNESCO, to contribute to the formulation of international rules on cultural activities. China also attaches importance to nurturing and developing its national cultural brand names and cultural industry, by encouraging and strengthening Sino-foreign cooperation to pave way for cultural enterprises to explore the international market, and to introduce outstanding cultural products with
Chinese characteristics to facilitate cultural exchanges between China and the world.

In recent years, China and UNESCO have conducted fruitful and effective cooperation in the field of culture, especially in promoting culture for sustainable urban development. China supports UNESCO's "Creative Cities Network" project, and has nominated many qualified Chinese cities to join the network, to boost its growth as well as its influence. Hangzhou, for example, is one of the UNESCO Cities of Crafts and Folk Art. The recently concluded 38th General Conference of UNESCO approved the establishment in Beijing of an International Center for Creativity and Sustainable Development as a Category 2 center under the auspices of UNESCO. I believe it will provide an effective platform for international cooperation of cultural policy makers, experts and scholars to further advance the integration of culture and science and technology, with a special highlight on culture of the Internet and information age, to produce new and enriched cultural forms and products. China will maintain firm support to UNESCO’s major cultural projects, including the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, to give full play to the role of culture in promoting sustainable urban development.

To conclude, I’d like to wish all the success to the conference, and to the presentation and discussion on the UNESCO Global Report on Culture and Sustainable Urban Development!

Thank you all.
Speech of
Kumaresh C. Misra

Dy. Secretary-General
Habitat III

Hangzhou, 10 December 2015
Excellences,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my honour and great pleasure to be here at the International Conference on Culture for Sustainable Cities at Hangzhou. I bring to you the greetings and best wishes from Dr Joan Clos, Executive Director UN-Habitat and Secretary General of Habitat III.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Hangzhou Municipal People’s Government and the National Commission of the People’s Republic of China for UNESCO for hosting and organizing this global conference on such an important element contributing to the formulation of the New Urban Agenda. I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to UNESCO who is so strongly contributing and collaborating with the Secretariat to the activities and build-up towards Habitat III in the framework of the UN Task Team, especially created to coordinate the UN system contribution to the preparatory process.

As you would be aware Habitat III is the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development mandated by resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly to take place in Quito, Ecuador from 17-20 October 2016. It was convened to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanization, to focus on the implementation of a New Urban Agenda, building on the Habitat Agenda of Istanbul in 1996. As you would also be aware, this conference takes place every twenty years starting from Vancouver, Canada in 1976.

This Conference provides a valuable opportunity to focus on the role of culture for sustainable cities.

The recent adoption of Agenda 2030 by the UN General Assembly, which will guide world development in the coming 15 years, was an unprecedented step, which consolidated our vision of urbanization as a tool, and an engine, for development. The vital role of urbanization for sustainable development is strongly reflected in the goal 11 of the Sustainable Development Agenda, which calls for making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. It is significant that in this new goal of urbanisation a thrust has been given in 11.4 namely “Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”. So not only sustainable urbanization has received global commitment it has also
recognised the important role of culture.

This conference is also happening at a moment when over half of the population is living in urban areas. By 2050, it is estimated that urban areas will accommodate an additional three billion people, representing 70% of the world’s population. So it is the cities that will see the concentration of human population and consequently be an amazing melting pot of all endeavours and activities.

In the context of this region, Asia Pacific remains not only the most populous area in the world but a region that has gone through an impressive period of economic developments in the last decades. The overall level and annual growth rate of urbanization (47.7% and 2.3%) were close to the global averages (53.6% and 2% respectively). This region is likely to see the largest concentration of human population in the urban areas. Along with this urban growth the region has also seen economic growth and development underlying a fact that urbanization and economic growth have gone hand in hand.

Industrialization and urbanization have been the engines of growth, innovation and job creation. Cities are responsible for 80% of global GDP. The prosperity of nations is intimately linked to the prosperity of their cities.

The impressive urbanization transformations in China have profoundly contributed to the economic and social prosperity of its citizens. 260 million migrants moved from agriculture to more productive activities. This progressive shift towards more productive sectors of the economy, mainly industrial manufacturing and services have increased employment and higher quality of life.

Mr. Chairman,

Excellences, Ladies and Gentleman,

This region which has seen so much of economic and urban transformation has immense cultural heritage coming from thousands of years. The periods of cultural renaissance have also been periods of great knowledge, innovation, prosperity, and wealth creation. This underlines the important role that culture plays in prosperity and well-being of human society. This conference by focusing on culture can shed valuable light and guide how in this period of rapid change
culture can be an important transformative and integrating role. Culture provides the force which would contribute in making our cities inclusive, safe resilient and sustainable. The expertise, knowledge and experience of the distinguished gathering here will make an invaluable contribution that will be crucial for the future Urban Agenda: Habitat III.

As I mentioned in October 2016, we are celebrating Habitat III: The UN Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development to take place in Quito, Ecuador. Habitat III is an exceptional opportunity to rethink the Urban Agenda, in which governments can build a new model of urban development, promoting equity, welfare and shared prosperity, leaving no one behind. Its preparatory process has opened an inclusive debate, involving all urban stakeholders at both national and local authorities. The debate is focused on the role of sustainable urbanization as an engine of economic growth and prosperity. More than ever, the power of well-planned urbanization for development is well recognized. And this is a crucial achievement for us.

As we mobilize support to the new urban agenda, this should be filled of contents and your active participation will be a great contribution.

The UN Task Team, as mentioned, has prepared a set of 22 Issue Papers on topics relevant to a global urban agenda and one of these is on “Urban Culture and Heritage”. As we speak Habitat III National Reports are being prepared by countries around the world to take stock of the last 20 years of urbanization, while 5 regional reports will be soon finalized for the world’s main regions as a result of the collaboration between the UN Regional and Economic Commissions and UN Habitat coordinated by the HIII Secretariat. A global synthesis will also be issued by mid next year.

Policy units composed by multi-sector groups of experts coming from different regions and constituent groups have also started to work to the elaboration of 10 policy papers to provide policy directions to the formulation of the New Urban Agenda.

These reports and papers are highlighting, among other, the role of culture in the development of cities and in particular the emergence of a shift from the industrial city to the knowledge city boosted by the digital revolution and the creative industries. Findings are showing that among
successful cities are those that flourish around centres of scientific and educational excellence, historical and cultural heritage, harnessing local qualities towards a place based development.

Moreover, there seems to be a wide call for the adoption of culture as a key tool for promoting sustainable urban development. This by preserving the urban, environmental and cultural identity of cities, enhancing the design and use of the public space as a cultural exchange arena, fostering quality of life and the development of creative economy, thus contributing to poverty eradication and increasing social cohesion;

Mr Chairman,

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by saying that the focus on urbanization is an indication of a strong belief that urbanization is not the ‘problem,’ but the ‘solution’ to many of the challenges of development the world is facing today.

Cities are engines of economic growth, social prosperity and environmental sustainability. Culture is at the heart of this prosperity. It is necessary to recognize and integrate all aspects of culture which will contribute towards greater social cohesion, promote innovation and truly build a dynamic inclusive society.

If we want to achieve Goal 11, Making cities and Human Settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable, the world needs to invest in three key aspects which Dr. Clos calls the three pronged approach: Rules and regulations; spatial planning and urban design; and urban financial sustainability.

Safeguarding cultural heritage and unleashing the power of culture is integral to the three pillars towards building sustainable cities. It will promote recognition of diversity, support innovation, spur economic activity and lead to both peace and prosperity.
As we approach Habitat III we have to recognize that the United Nations resolutions have also mandated that the Habitat III conference will result in a concise, focused, forward looking and action oriented outcome document: The New Urban Agenda. Hence we deliberate on this important subject of culture and sustainable cities let us focus on how are deliberations and recommendation can be incorporated in global urban planning and implementation towards achieving the goals set by the Sustainable Development Goal 2030. We have the objective and we must see how we can operationalize and achieve them.

Mr Chairman,

Thank you once again for giving me the opportunity to participate in this conference. On a personal note I come from that part of India that had strong cultural ties with China. The travelogues and writings of scholars like Fa Hian and Hiuen Tsang built a unique cultural bond of scholarship and exchange. I look forward to the bonding and dynamic power of culture in promoting prosperity and inclusiveness and your recommendations in achieving it.

I thank the organizers for the warm hospitality and look forward to see your contributions towards Habitat III. See you in Quito in October 2016.

Thank you very much.