

CONFERENCE

Cultural Heritage in Iraq: how to protect?

Monday 29th September 2014

UNESCO, Room IV

125 avenue de Suffren, 75015 Paris

15h00 – 19h00

Speech of Prof. Mahmood AL-MULLAKHALAF, Permanent Delegate of Iraq to UNESCO

Her Excellency Mrs. Irina Bokova, Director-General of
UNESCO

Excellencies, Distinguished ambassadors, and Permanent
Delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

Allow me first of all to present my thankfulness and gratitude to the French government presented by the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Culture and Communication and the Permanent Delegation to UNESCO for their efforts in participating to this important conference, I would like to thank also the Director-General of UNESCO for her participation and her willingness to protect and preserve the cultural heritage of Iraq.

Organizing this conference which coincides with the consensus of the world, the United Nations and the Security Council has felted the danger of this terrorist organization

who threatens the international community, to stand beside Iraq and to support him in his combat fight.

We thank France, whose President has previously visited Baghdad to show his great support to Iraq and its national government, and also for organizing the International Conference on fighting terrorism, in Paris on the 17th of this month, in the presence of both Presidents Francois Hollande and Fuad Maasum. We also thank the countries of the world, those who participated at this conference and those whom supporting our fight against terrorism. Nevertheless, we also want from all of them to stand with us in protecting our cultural and archeological heritage.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Iraq, Mesopotamia the cradle of civilizations, the land of exceptional civilizations such as Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Abbasid, who has served the humanity in inventing the writing and the legislation of laws, which exceeded six thousand years of history. As you all know that several of these archaeological sites are inscribed on the World Heritage List of UNESCO Samarra, Hatra, Asshur and recently the citadel of Erbil. Iraq is known also for its cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious diversity which gives Iraq a unique symbol for the coexistence between these different communities to live together in peace. Meanwhile, Iraq suffered over the centuries from many attacks from different forces who want to destroy every civilized and intellectual

society, Baghdad the capital of culture, literature, sciences, arts and philosophy suffered over centuries from the armies of Hulaku, the forces of ignorance and others.

However today, the same evil forces think that history can be repeated, but we are sure that with the support of the international community and its awareness they certainly will be defeated.

These outrageous assaults on our shared heritage from these terrorists and extremists groups, who kills, destroys shrines, churches, mosques, and also by trafficking the cultural properties present a threat to our cultural and religious heritage, which is of course the heritage of the entire humanity. We ring the alarm and call on the whole world to stand with Iraq and its national government which represents the entire national communities to save the people of Mesopotamia with all its ethnicities', its different religions, its civilization, its cultural legacy, and its souls too.

Ladies and Gentlemen

You know that our people with all its components welcomed the elimination of the dictatorship, and since 2003, UNESCO contributed in the establishment of democracy in my country, assisting us in writing its new constitution, putting strategies for the process of reconstruction, offered expertise, and invested its prestigious position to provide any possible help to our people in preserving their cultural and educational institutions , in inviting the Iraqi intellectuals to dialogue, and

to update and develop the curriculums. And when terrorists blew up the shrine of Al-Askari mosque in Samarra in 2006, UNESCO took quickly the initiative to present its help to protect the cultural and spiritual heritage of the Iraqis.

Today we are most in need of concerted efforts by the international community to protect this ancient human heritage, and to fight against trafficking its cultural property, its manuscripts, looting museums, and destroying the places of prayers, as churches, monasteries, mosques and Husseiniyas and to protect the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity.

We call on all States that have signed the UNESCO Conventions such as The Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict 1954, The 1970 Convention for the means of prohibiting and preventing the illicit import export and transfer of ownership of cultural property, the 1972 World heritage convention, and the declaration of the General Conference of UNESCO in 2003, concerning the Intentional destruction of Cultural Heritage, to implement these agreements to help us to defeat terrorism, and to participate in safeguarding and restoring our cultural heritage.

I would like to refer also to the initiative of the Director General who appealed for an Emergency expert meeting for the safeguard of Iraq's rich and diverse cultural heritage, which was held at UNESCO headquarters on July 17th, of this year, where Iraqi experts and international specialists worked together to put an action plan aimed at protecting Iraq's

cultural heritage by strengthening communication and coordination between the concerned parties to preserve the heritage, to raise awareness, to make sure that suitable measures are taken to monitor the states of conservation of heritage, to prepare emergency measures for technical assistance and training to develop mechanisms to protect this heritage, for this we call on all the countries of the world to give their full support for the promotion and the implementation of this action plan, and to support the proposed resolution presented to the next session of the Executive Board of UNESCO, calling on the Board to take immediate action to the protection of the Iraqi cultural heritage.

Also, I want to thank all ladies and gentlemen who attended this conference who supports the protection of Iraqi cultural heritage and we appreciate the efforts of all the participants experts, academicians and researchers hoping to reach positive and fruitful results to maintain the heritage from the dangers of trafficking and provide suitable measures to preserve it, as well as the museums' collections and manuscripts.

Finally, on behalf of my country, allow me to thank France again, His Excellency The President Holland. Your excellency, Mr. Lalliot the Ambassador of France to UNESCO, the Permanent Delegation of France to UNESCO, and all the French intellectuals, experts and researchers, who hurried to show their willingness to stand up against this brutal attack

by rallying all the nations of the world who are keen to preserve our heritage, as well as the practical support to fight against the international terrorism, which, if continued it could pose a growing threat beyond our region, we can't trust these terrorist killers, who have no religion, values, principles, or any humanity. The nations of the world, by supporting Iraq, should give a harsh lesson to these terrorist groups, not only by condemning or deploring, but supporting by all means possible to give a harsh lesson to these evil forces and terrorists. ((Being silent on these monstrous acts could affect the culture and the heritage of all the countries of the world)), (an Arabic proverb says that one's who doesn't stand with justice is a silent demon).

I would like also to thank UNESCO for all its efforts already deployed and its future support, despite risks and difficulties, we thank Mrs Bokova who said lately "attacks against culture are attacks against people, against their identities, against their values against their future", "Protecting Iraqi heritage must be an integral part of all peacebuilding efforts". Surely we will work together and hopefully we will succeed in rising up Iraq, and in protecting its heritage, in spite of all the challenges and despite all the forces of evil and terrorists. Which we are sure it will be defeated at last, and the Iraqis will never forget those who are standing with them.

Peace be upon you and Allah's mercy and blessings.