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Rescuing mankind's cultural heritage

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The interfaith and intercultural dialogue is meant to increase our understanding, our appreciation and our respect for other faiths and enhance our sensitivity towards the cultures and beliefs of other peoples with different religious and cultural backgrounds. This in turn facilitates dialogue and dialogue builds bridges and opens avenues of communication between peoples, bringing us closer to tolerance, partnership, friendship and ultimately peace.

Interfaith dialogue is also of paramount importance in multicultural societies, where different ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious groups live together and where respect for each other's culture, religion and identity constitute the cornerstone for harmonious and peaceful coexistence.

Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue remains extremely important in our world today, which is ravaged by extremism and terrorism, by acts of aggression, by intolerance, fanaticism and lack of respect for the "other". Millions of people have suffered over the years from persecution, genocide, inhuman treatment, discrimination and extermination because of their religion or their cultural and ethnic background. Thousands of invaluable religious and cultural monuments, sites and objects have been destroyed and looted in the hands of aggressors, conquerors and terrorists, in their deliberate pursuit of ethnically cleansing the areas they conquer, by forcing people to flee and by erasing every trace of their heritage and identity. The perpetrators, in most instances, are state and military actors, as well as paramilitary, extremist and terrorist groups. The victims are, on the one hand, innocent people, men, women and children and on the other hand, archaeological and religious heritage objects and monuments, which stood intact for centuries and even millennia and now are the target of destruction and plundering.

Respecting and appreciating our different identities, cultures and religions is manifested first and foremost in recognizing the value and the importance of

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protecting cultural heritage. Without such respect, without the acceptance and tolerance of other cultures and religions, without embracing them as creations of our common humanity, as belonging to the cultural heritage of mankind, we shall never reach peace and we shall never reach understanding among nations and peoples.

We all need to join forces in order to preserve and protect the heritage that has been entrusted to us by past generations and to enable us to bequeath it to the future generations. We must not allow war and conflict to destroy the treasures that constitute the cultural heritage of mankind. We must not allow humanity to be defeated by the forces of hatred and intolerance.

This is why it is important to place at the very heart of all interfaith and intercultural dialogue the need to respect and protect cultural and religious heritage. This is why any such dialogue will remain unconvincing, if it is not founded on mutual commitments towards respecting and protecting each other's heritage.

During periods of unprecedented threats, turmoil and moral crisis, such as the ones the world is facing today, we have to redouble our efforts and create ring fences to protect the ancient civilizations and the cultural and religious heritage of mankind. We owe an invaluable collective debt to this heritage. If we fail in our efforts to protect it, then we lose key evidence of humanity's unbroken continuity. Then we also lose the opportunity to bring closer, in a peaceful and harmonious coexistence and mutual respect, the different cultures and religions of the world. On the other hand, if we join forces and remain solid in our commitment not to tolerate the destruction and plundering of cultural and religious heritage, we shall succeed. This should be our common challenge and our joint contribution to the success of interfaith and intercultural dialogue.
