



**Remarks by**

**H.E. Mr. Mohamed Khaled Khiari**  
**Acting President of the 68<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations**  
**General Assembly**

**Special Thematic Debate of the UN General Assembly on Culture and**  
**Sustainable Development in the Post-2015 Development Agenda**  
Opening Session

**New York**  
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Excellencies,  
Deputy Secretary-General,  
Distinguished Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the President of the General Assembly, I am pleased to welcome you to the Special Thematic Debate of the UN General Assembly on Culture and Sustainable Development in the Post-2015 Development Agenda. I wish to convey my appreciation to Ms. Irina Bokova and UNESCO for taking the lead in organizing this event. UNESCO has long stood at the forefront of the UN's efforts to lead operational programmes in the field of culture and to promote the role of culture for sustainable development.

Today's Debate was specifically mandated by the General Assembly resolution adopted last December 2013 on culture and sustainable development. Recognizing that culture is an essential component of human development, Member States acknowledged the role of culture as an enabler but also as a driver of sustainable development. Indeed, culture contributes in many ways to the three dimensions of sustainable development.

From cultural heritage to creative industries, from sustainable tourism to cultural infrastructure, culture is a fast growing economic sector, which drives innovation and creativity. The cultural sector is an important source of income generation and job creation, including at the local level. Drawing on traditional knowledge and culture, livelihood practices such as craft or agriculture can foster community-based economic growth and contribute to improving living conditions.

Culture is also the thread that binds together the social fabric of our societies, defining our sense of identity and belonging. Cultural dialogue is therefore a powerful vehicle to promote inclusion and strengthen social cohesion, and can also play a role in conflict-prevention and reconciliation. When we open our eyes to see the world through the lens of other cultures, we open our hearts to embrace the cultural diversity and riches of humanity. Cultural dialogue allows us to welcome and appreciate those who are different and to build on those differences to create more inclusive, open and peaceful societies.

Finally, culture can also contribute to environmental sustainability. From food to medicine, from national symbols to traditional celebrations, many cultural practices are intrinsically linked with biodiversity and the cyclical rhythms of nature. As we seek to restore a balanced relationship between humankind and our environment, we can draw on the knowledge, skills and experience from the many cultures that embrace and cultivate harmony with nature.

Excellencies,

Culture has long been associated with tradition, customs and arts, rather than resources to enable and drive development. As globalization has increased human mobility and exchanges of cultural products and services, we have seen a broadening of the notion of culture. Developing countries now view their cultures as an asset in eradicating poverty while middle-income countries are seeking innovative development paths, which are human centered and culturally sensitive.

A number of countries are now looking to broaden their use of culture as a development tool. For example, in preparation for the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), which will be held later this year, SIDS have recognized that culture represents a strategic opportunity for their sustainable development.

Culture has an essential role in bringing true ownership to individuals and communities in the quest to elaborate a more holistic approach to development. Yet, development actors increasingly recognize that one size does not fit all. Understanding and considering a society's cultural aspects is critical to adapting development approaches to local contexts and ensuring successful outcomes. At the same time, we must ensure that important decisions regarding culture are open to all and inclusive, and that previously underrepresented groups, such as women, have a seat at the table.

The post-2015 development agenda brings a new paradigm that will require all of us to change the way we think and the way we act. Such transformative exercise will not only necessitate political will, it will also require cultural leadership. Indeed, culture permeates all areas of our lives, affecting the way we do business, engage in leisure or relate with each other. Cultural leaders and artists have thus a tremendous influence on public opinions and

behaviours and we will count on their voices to support and encourage the profound changes we are hoping to achieve.

In this regard, the President would like to announce a cultural event and concert that he will host on 6 June. On this occasion, a number of respected performing artists and celebrities from all corners of the globe will lend their voices, names and talent to raise awareness on the post-2015 agenda and our global commitment to eradicate poverty.

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our Assembly of nations is a mere reflection of the incredible cultural diversity of our world. You are here today hailing from all corners of the globe to share your various experiences and to give due consideration to culture and sustainable development in the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda. It is my hope that today's debate will bring us useful insights on how we can leverage our diversity and creativity to achieve our development goals.

We have committed to elaborate a single framework applicable to all, North and South, rich and poor, young and old. In our efforts to shape a universal agenda, culture can help us ensure it is truly relevant to all.

Thank you.

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