

The Preservation of Heritage

By **IRINA BOKOVA**

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Born in Bulgaria, Irina Bokova graduated from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations and was a Fellow at the University of Maryland (Washington, DC) before following an executive programme at the John F. Kennedy School of Government (Harvard University). She became Minister of Foreign Affairs (ad-interim) as well as Ambassador of Bulgaria to

France, Monaco and UNESCO and Personal Representative of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie. Irina Bokova has been Director-General of UNESCO since 2009. She is the first woman and the first Eastern European to lead the Organisation and is on the 2016 Forbes List of the world's most influential women.

Heritage is more than stones and buildings – it carries value, meaning and history. It embodies the benchmarks and legacy that define our common humanity and helps ensure the cohesion of societies. Heritage demonstrates that the dialogue between cultures is a reality – it tells a harmonious history of constant exchange and proposes a common future. Behind the beauty of Palmyra, there is the history of the cultural influences of Asia, Persia and Rome and the identity of the Syrian people. In the sanctuary of Jonah in Mosul, there is the meeting of Judaism, Christianity and Islam – a symbol of unity.

Violent extremists know the power of heritage to bring people together, to give confidence and hope, and this is precisely why they target cultural heritage, to terrorise populations, undermine societies and advance radicalisation. The deliberate destruction of heritage is a war crime and it has become a tactic of war in a global strategy of cultural cleansing, as we have witnessed in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. In this context, heritage protection is more than a cultural issue. It is a key security issue, inseparable from the protection of human life.

In 2015, the United Nations Security Council recognised the role of illicit trafficking of cultural property in the financing of terrorism, and entrusted UNESCO and Interpol with the task to support Member states in the fight against illicit trafficking of “blood antiquities”. Earlier this year, on 24 March 2017, at the initiative of France and Italy, supported by over 57 Member States, the United Nations Security

Council unanimously adopted another historic resolution on the Protection of Cultural Heritage, recognising the role of heritage protection for social cohesion, and building a lasting peace. A week later, the Members of the G7 adopted the Florence Declaration and organised their first-ever meeting of cultural ministers.

This historic shift is the result of a strong mobilisation by UNESCO over the past few years to connect the dots between cultural, security and humanitarian issues. UNESCO has coordinated international efforts to protect cultural heritage, working closely with Member States and

Maqam Ibrahim (The Station of Abraham) is situated next to the Kaaba and preserves the footprints of Ibrahim from the time Makkah was founded



relevant international organisations. This protection must take many forms and be led on all fronts. In Mali, for instance, UNESCO carried out a comprehensive programme for the protection of cultural heritage, and, for the first time, UN peacekeeping forces have been mandated and trained to protect heritage. UNESCO distributed some 8,000 heritage maps and passports to the troops on the ground. The mausoleums in Timbuktu, which were destroyed in 2012, were rebuilt in 2015 with local masons, and they stand again today as symbols of reconciliation and recovery. UNESCO worked also with the International Criminal Court to end impunity for war crimes against culture. The criminal responsible for the destruction of the fabled Islamic shrines of Timbuktu has been sentenced to nine years in prison in a ground-breaking case that will help to deter other attacks. Action at all such levels – cultural, legal, military and technical – is simply unparalleled in the world.

We must not miss a single opportunity to transmit knowledge about our shared history, about the roads and the voyagers and pilgrims who travelled long distances, connecting different regions and cultures, bringing the world together as one

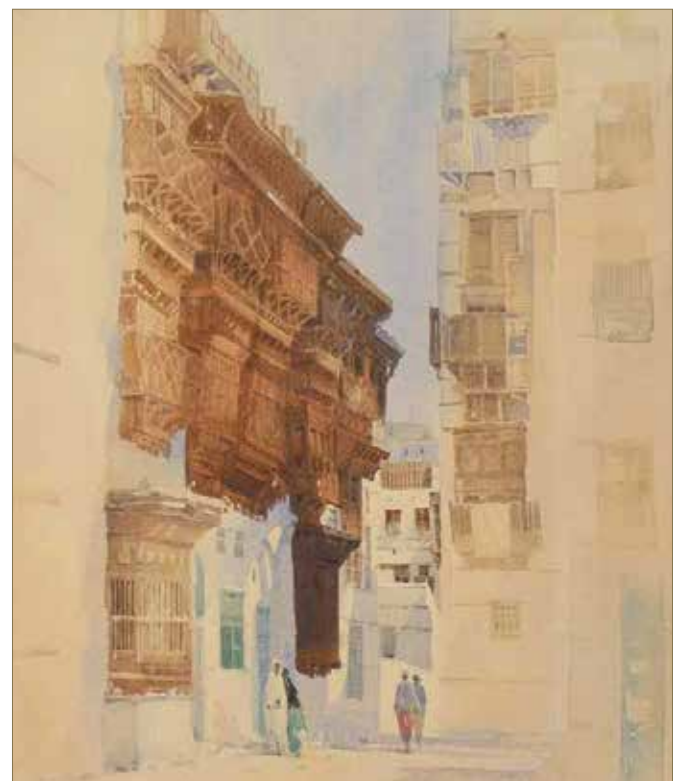
As we embrace modernity and seek to transmit our own legacy to future generations, we must continue to protect humanity's shared cultural heritage. In this, we all have a role to play, as experts, teachers or citizens. We can work on the safeguarding of monuments and contribute to the sharing of knowledge in schools, museums, libraries, in the media, among friends and in everyday discussions. We must raise awareness about the shared history of our common humanity, and know more about the historical developments that have brought us together as a single family. Take the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, where UNESCO has designated four world heritage sites of outstanding cultural value, including *Historic Jeddah, the Gate to Makkah*. Historic Jeddah is situated on the eastern shore of the Red Sea. From the 7th century AD, it was established as a major port for Indian Ocean trade routes, channelling goods to Makkah. It was also the gate for Muslim pilgrims to Makkah who arrived by sea. These twin roles saw the city develop into a thriving multicultural centre, characterised by a distinctive architectural tradition, including tower houses built in the late 19th century by the city's mercantile elites, combining Red Sea coastal coral building traditions with influences and crafts from along the trade routes. As global citizens, we should know about this history we share, to strengthen the defences of peace,

tolerance and dialogue. It is not only through major restoration programmes that one protects and transmits world heritage, but also through educational efforts, to lead the battle of ideas against ignorance and hatred.

In this spirit, I wish to thank one of our most dynamic UNESCO Goodwill Ambassadors, Professor Nasser Khalili, for his passion and unfailing commitment to the values of heritage. He has spent considerable time and effort safeguarding Islamic heritage, and is now the custodian of the largest group of objects related to the Holy City of Makkah. His magnificent collection, *Hajj and the Art of Pilgrimage* is being documented by major scholars in the field through multiple informative and pioneering volumes, which will represent a definitive record illuminating the religious, spiritual, cultural and historical majesty of the Sacred City of Makkah in all its glory.

In times of turbulence, when some seek to promote fear and destroy heritage, we must respond with more education, with more culture and more wisdom. We must not miss a single opportunity to transmit knowledge about our shared history, about the roads and the voyagers and pilgrims who travelled long distances, connecting different regions and cultures, bringing the world together as one. This is the spirit of the *Unite4Heritage* campaign launched by UNESCO. This is also the spirit of this *Art of Pilgrimage* shared by Professor Khalili. I am confident this historic publication will inspire more people to take pride and draw lessons from this heritage, in a spirit of mutual respect and understanding. E

Old Jeddah, the Gate to Makkah: A UNESCO World Heritage Site



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