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Partnerships for World Heritage Cities

Culture as a Vector for Sustainable Urban Development

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Safeguarding and Development of World Heritage Cities

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The 30th Anniversary of the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, adopted on 16 November 1972 by the UNESCO General Conference at its 17th session, offered an opportunity to review both the success of the Convention and its shortcomings. Our common challenge for the future lies in how the Convention, as a normative and operational tool, can better serve the process of sustainable development for the world population. To be sure, the framers of the World Heritage Convention sought to protect natural and cultural properties of “outstanding universal value” from the destructive forces of modernization. But it was not their intention to save only the jewels of planet earth and human creation at the detriment of, or in isolation from the rest. Nor, is it the objective of the Convention to refuse modernity or stop development. It is with a vision of the future that the Convention came into being; hence it is our duty to apply the Convention to meet the needs of the future by gauging the options before us to choose our collective future. The future of our cities has thus been the focus of the World Heritage Cities Programme, launched in 1996.

If there is one defining feature of the past century, it is the expansion of cities in the North and the South. The United Nations predicts that by 2025, nearly two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities. By 2015, the planet will count 33 mega cities (defined as more than eight million inhabitants), of which 18 will be in Asia, 6 in Latin America, 3 in the Arab States and 2 in sub-Saharan Africa¹. To millions eking out a meagre existence on the land, cities continue to offer a vision of opportunity. Yet the rural exodus, combined with population growth, have stretched many cities of the developing world to the seams, inviting burgeoning poverty, untenable pollution and erratic construction of roads and buildings.

Cities face a myriad of pressures that are cutting into their most intimate identity. Transport, housing, retail, recreation and tourism all compete over a relatively small area. In some cases, land speculation is relegating inhabitants and local trades to the fringes to hastily make way for office space, underground parking or subway tracks. Public works for utilities extension and widening of inner city roads have led to demolitions of entire ensembles of historic buildings, irreversibly altering the traditional urban layout. In other cases, historic buildings have been demolished and reconstructed in incongruous manner. With the exponential growth in travel, cultural tourism has become a leading industry in the past decades, yet all too often, accommodating tourists happens at the expense of local economies and inhabitants.

Ringling the Alarm

Defacing a city – places charged with spiritual, emotional and symbolic values – is tantamount to violating part of our identity. The alarm however has been rung. Several

European States introduced the notion of “safeguarded areas” within cities during the 1960s, extending heritage conservation laws beyond monuments and archaeological sites. The same decade, UNESCO adopted several recommendations concerning the safeguarding of cultural properties. This concern culminated in 1972 with the adoption by the UNESCO General Conference at its 17th session of the *Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*, which paved an avant-garde approach by emphasizing the intricate links between heritage, conservation and harmonious development. That heritage and development are inseparable is a leitmotiv of the Convention, foreshadowing the concept of “sustainability” – preserving our heritage for the benefit of future generations. Culture is the bridge between the two, the vital ingredient for kneading a harmonious balance between past, present and future.

To date, 175 States have ratified the Convention, espousing its vision of sites holding “outstanding universal value”. The World Heritage List currently comprises 730 sites, constituting as many conservation challenges. Although 189 sites are strictly defined as cities, this number climbs beyond 300 when monuments within cities and cities belonging to cultural landscapes are included.

While an inscription on the List consecrates a site's universal character, it can also spell undesired effects in the absence of integrated urban policies. On one end of the spectrum, poverty in historic districts poses a direct threat to cultural heritage, through insalubrious housing, lack of sanitation, basic social facilities and maintenance; on the other, such districts run the risk of transforming into gentrified “city museums” devoid of local neighbourhood shops, artisans, schools and social facilities.

The Convention's Role

Article 5 of the Convention makes explicit reference to measures that State Parties should endeavour to take in order to protect their cultural and natural heritage. As such, they are relevant to historic urban areas:

- “(a) to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes;*
- (b) to set up within its territories, where such services do not exist, one or more services for the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage with an appropriate staff (...);*
- (c) to develop scientific and technical studies and research and to work out such operating methods as will make the State capable of counteracting the dangers that threaten its cultural or natural heritage;*
- (d) to take the appropriate legal, scientific, technical, administrative and financial measures necessary for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of this heritage; and*
- (e) to foster the establishment or development of national or regional centres for training in the protection, conservation and presentation of the cultural and natural heritage and to encourage scientific research in this field.”*

UNESCO Recommendations related to Historic Cities

The Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding of the Beauty and Character of Landscapes and Sites, adopted on 11 December 1962 by UNESCO refers to the need for “special provisions...to ensure the

1. United Nations World Population census 2002 report - <http://www.un.org/esa/population/unpop.htm>

safeguarding of certain urban landscapes and sites which are, in general, most threatened by building operations and land speculations." It calls for "measures to be taken for construction of all types of public and private buildings...to be designed...to meet certain aesthetic requirements, (and) while avoiding facile imitation of...traditional and picturesque forms, should be in harmony with the general atmosphere which it desired to safeguard."

The Recommendation concerning the Preservation of Cultural Property Endangered by Public or Private Works, adopted on 19 November 1968 by UNESCO, notes that "cultural property,...the product and witness of different traditions and of the spiritual achievements of the past" are "increasingly threatened by public and private works resulting from industrial development and urbanization." It calls upon States to "harmonize the preservation of the cultural heritage with the changes which follow from social and economic development, making serious efforts to meet both requirements in a broad spirit of understanding, and with reference to appropriate planning." It also calls for measures to protect not only scheduled monuments but also "less important structures, that "show" the historical relations and setting of historic quarters."

In 1976, UNESCO adopted a further Recommendation concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas, which advances a comprehensive approach that has been refined over the years. "Every historic area and their surroundings should be considered as a coherent whole... whose balance... depends on the fusion of various parts... including human activities as much as the buildings, spatial organization and the surroundings. All valid elements... have a significance in relation to the whole... bringing the question of integrity in addition to that of authenticity."

Turning Point

Since the 1970s, UNESCO has supported many projects for the protection of historic cities (Fez, Sana'a, Historic Cairo, Old Havana). Yet Habitat II (International Conference on Human Settlements, Istanbul 1996), ushered in a new approach, relayed by the *Programme for the Safeguarding and Development of World Heritage Cities*, first launched in 1996 in several Asian cities as part of UNESCO's contribution to the Plan of Action of Habitat II. Strongly condemning an unsustainable urban model prevalent on all continents, participants of the Habitat II Conference from across civil society urged that cities must first and foremost focus on improving the quality of life, by providing "adequate shelter for all" and "sustainable human settlements in an urbanising world". Municipal authorities, non-governmental organizations and civil society called for new ways to "humanize the city" and underscored a "people-centred" vision of urban development inscribed in Article 30 of the Habitat II Agenda.

UNESCO for its part, through the *Programme for the Safeguarding and Development of World Heritage Cities*, adopted a new focus to support States Parties to the Convention in improving the quality of life in historic cities while respecting their character, forged through the ages. Emblematic pilot projects put the accent on improving the skills of local authorities in managing cultural assets as part of their socio-economic development strategy. This implies an appropriate policy framework, laws and regulations to guide all interventions in historic areas and a comprehen-

sive vision of how a historic district interacts with the city and the region at large. As such, pilot projects embrace a wide range of activities, from recording and mapping heritage, offering advice on legal protection, environmental issues, transport, financing, setting up micro-credit schemes for the rehabilitation of privately-owned historic houses, workshops on specific conservation skills and more broadly, the development of conservation policies and plans. These activities reach out to stakeholders at different levels, from ordinary citizens to city authorities.

This integrated approach to conservation - which takes into account the cultural, economic and social dimensions of a city as a whole - has profound implications. For many national and local governments, mobilizing the necessary human and financial resource to meet this obligation is a daunting challenge, calling for public-private partnerships at the local, national and international level. The trend toward decentralization sweeping many countries calls for enhanced efforts to train skilled staff at the local level. Furthermore, because heritage is not only about national monuments but also about privately owned properties, authorities require the administrative capacity to provide fiscal incentives and subsidized loans to inhabitants to renew their dwellings.

Pilot projects first launched in Asia, include Luang Prabang (Laos), Kathmandu Valley (Nepal), Vigan and Manila (Philippines), Bangkok (Thailand), Hué and Hoi An (Vietnam), Lijiang and Lhasa (China). With the endorsement of the World Heritage Committee at its 25th session in December 2001, the World Heritage Cities Programme, constituted through partnerships with other UNESCO Programmes and projects managed by the Organization's Regional Offices, and city-to-city decentralized co-operation projects brokered by UNESCO, is now being extended to other regions of the world through site-specific activities. Pilot projects have been initiated in Ithaa de Mozambique, Porto Novo (Benin), St Louis (Senegal) in Africa; Zabid (Yemen), Islamic Cairo (Egypt), the four ksours of Oudane, Chinguetti, Tichitt and Oualata (Mauritania), Essaouira (Algeria), Fez & Mekness (Morocco), Aleppo & Damascus (Syria) in the Arab States; and Georgetown (Guyana), Old Havana (Cuba), Mexico City (Mexico) in Latin America and the Caribbean. Activities have also been initiated in Istanbul (Turkey), Riga (Latvia), Vilnius (Lithuania), St Petersburg (Russian Federation) and Baku (Azerbaijan). A common thread runs through all these projects, and more broadly, UNESCO's strategic approach to cities: protecting the urban historic fabric is a holistic endeavour, for which a city's cultural identity serves as the pre-eminent guide.

Major conservation challenges facing urban centres are being analysed through this World Heritage Cities Programme, taking stock of existing laws and regulations governing conservation and addressing issues of housing, tourism, commerce and transport, especially in relation to the site's authenticity. The Programme, through its regional and thematic streams based on operational activities at the site level gives particular importance to sharing lessons learned and strengthening links between sites and regions facing similar challenges. The approach advocates a stronger focus on management and skills, and places heritage within the larger economic and social context. The Programme seeks to open new paths of co-operation and to mobilize support through partnerships and links to other programmes managed by not only the World Heritage Centre, but other divisions and sectors of UNESCO at both its Headquarters and Field Offices, many of which are being carried out in co-operation with bilateral and other multilateral development agencies.

Heritage House Guard Local Identity

In Luang Prabang, Hué, and Istanbul, inhabitants can now consult their local Heritage House, established under the aegis of UNESCO, with support from numerous partners. All are located in renovated historic buildings, characteristic of the local architecture. These houses first act as a community advisory service by offering free technical assistance to citizens in drawing up renovation plans and in advising other municipal departments on issues that may impact on heritage. They also run training course for local experts and, more generally, promote awareness of heritage values.

In Luang Prabang, the Heritage House since its establishment in 1997 has completed an architectural survey of over 1,000 buildings located in the core area and took stock of infrastructure and socio-economic needs to develop the Safeguarding and Enhancement Plan. It also evaluates all construction permits to ensure that they do not violate the historic area. Its environment department runs projects for the protection and enhancement of the urban wetlands, while its economic and social development department supports partnerships with neighbourhood associations for public works, employment generation and economic activities related to heritage.

In Hué, a traditional Vietnamese pile building near the Hué citadel opened its doors as the Heritage House in 2000. All project activities are channeled through the House. Besides offering similar services as its counterparts in other cities, an international festival Hué 2000 also marked the House's official inauguration, with a heritage itinerary to raise awareness of World Heritage values launched on the occasion.

In Istanbul, the House conducted survey and inventory work in several areas in Fatih District. It offers advice to inhabitants on how housing and public space improvement works can be carried out in accordance with national cultural heritage protection law and regulations. Over 200 buildings are being repaired to initiate inner city renewal through a housing improvement scheme.

Related Activities

World Heritage Sustainable Tourism (2001)

The *World Heritage Tourism Programme*, also adopted by the Committee in 2001, aims to put forward models that combine heritage conservation with sustainable tourism development. It will, for example, study how different tourism management structures work (state run, public-private, joint companies, private contractors) or link tourism-generated income to finance conservation.

World Heritage Management for Poverty Reduction (2001)

Cities are also targeted in the crosscutting *Poverty Reduction through Sustainable World Heritage Management* (approved by the General Conference of UNESCO at its 31st session for inclusion in the 2002-2003 Programme), a contribution to the UN Decade for the Alleviation of Poverty. Reconciling heritage and development is the underlying thrust of this project, which targets five sites, each faced with problems of poverty, rising property prices and ill-managed tourism. Very specific actions will be led, in the end goal of developing new strategies for improving lives of the poor. The programme broaches all issues that can lead the way out from poverty: legal protection for the right to property, gainful employment through practical

training, and improved housing and sanitation through access to financial and technical resources. At the same time, it guarantees better protection to World Heritage Sites through sustainable tourism and attention to cultural pluralism and diversity within communities. Pilot actions are being undertaken in five target cities: Luang Prabang (Laos, see page 30), Saint Louis of Senegal, Porto Novo (Benin, see page 37), Georgetown (Guyana, see page 39) and the Six Canal Towns of the Lower Yangtze River (China see page 71,72).

Other programmes and activities addressing urban challenges are also being carried out by the Social and Human Science, the Science and the Culture sectors of UNESCO. Among others, MOST a research programme aiming at managing social transformation has been developed in order to tackle urban social issues, environmental protection and urban identity. Within the cultural sector, the Cities for Peace Prize is awarded to municipalities that have succeeded in strengthening social cohesion, improving living conditions in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and developing genuine urban harmony. Many UNESCO Chairs deal with urban sustainability and governance. The UNESCO regional offices in Bangkok, Beijing, Havana and Mexico have also developed projects related to urban issues.

Sustainable Principles

In encouraging an integrated approach to protection and conservation, all programmes and projects brokered by the World Heritage Centre underscore the importance of maintaining cultural integrity while serving the practical needs of inhabitants.

Respect for Character

The Nara Seminar on the Development and the Integrity of Historic Cities (1999), which gathered mayors, governors and experts from cities across Europe and Asia, recommended the following approach for the harmonious management of historic areas.

Understanding

The value of historic areas depends on much more than the quality of individual buildings – on the historic layout; on a particular mix of uses; on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on shop fronts, (...) and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits pedestrian use of spaces between buildings. The understanding of this value helps to provide a framework for developing other principles for planning policy.

Analysis

An appraisal should be undertaken to show how the elements make up the integrity of historic cities. The analysis and knowledge of the evolution through time, the types and forms of buildings and spaces and their mutual relationships and functions are basic references for planning tools and criteria for the management and culturally-sustainable development of historic cities.

Sustainability

Cities need to remain economically, socially, environmentally and culturally viable, so that they can be passed on to future generations. Renewal, regeneration, enhancement and management require a medium and long term vision that is both achievable and sustainable, embodying the concept of custodianship for future generations.

Equity and accessibility

Cities need to be managed in an atmosphere of common local and international ownership. Action needs to be implemented on the basis of equality of opportunity and access.

With its partners, the World Heritage Centre has strongly defended the notion that a city's identity – both physical and immaterial – is a springboard for sustainable development (see box above). Although there is no model to follow – each city has its own specific challenges to identify – the approach rests upon several pillars, discussed during an international workshop held in Urbino (Italy) in November 2002 as part of the Convention's 30th anniversary celebrations.

The Territorial Dimension: Understanding the Broad Picture

Historic centres are intrinsically linked to surrounding urban, peri-urban and rural territories. All too often, fringe areas are disfigured by infrastructure servicing the safeguarded areas, rather than being integrated into the heritage-based development project. Partnerships with public and private entities to develop public infrastructure and determine land-use are crucial to ensuring that projects do not undermine a site's heritage value.

Social Development: Respecting Diversity

Maintaining or reinforcing a neighbourhood's social diversity is a key to steering clear of the common pitfalls of gentrification on the one hand or poverty on the other. This calls for specific policies, such as a housing credit system adapted to revenue, incentives enabling inhabitants to improve their dwellings, promoting adaptive reuse of historic buildings, ensuring the proximity of schools, stores and recreation spots, and more generally, fostering community involvement in preservation actions. Keeping craftspeople and small businesses in the city centre, encouraging creative and live arts, are all part of ensuring that cultural identity is enhanced, not undermined. It also enjoins authorities to ensure that the upgrading of basic infrastructure takes into account the special character of the city.

Empowering Citizens

Inhabitants are custodians of their city; they should be involved in preserving and promoting their heritage. Sharing information on policies and a city's special values, whether through new information technologies or mass media public education campaigns, is essential to promoting awareness and a sense of civic engagement. The business sector should also be taken on board to promote heritage within the local community. Because values are shaped early, UNESCO developed "World Heritage in Young Hands," an education resource kit for teachers that promotes awareness among youth of conservation issues, offering a journey through the world's cultural and natural heritage.

Economic Development: Reinforcing Mixed Use and Creating Jobs

Small and micro-credit enterprises can be strengthened through public-private sector partnerships. If tourism, in particular, can stimulate economic activity in historic areas, with benefits for the city at large, it must be rooted in a concern for equity, the environment and cultural traditions, and not turn whole districts into sanitized open-air museums. Heritage can serve as an engine for the local economy, providing the "sense of place" is respected.

Protecting the Environment

Planning must take stock of a city's natural environment, promote public spaces for encounter and exchange, and

offer essential services, such as water, sewerage, electricity, and telecommunications. The modernisation of collective and private transport systems is a major challenge to stem damage caused by congestion and air pollution. All too often, under pressure from major contractors, a standardized industrial model is favoured. Instead, the system must cater to the city's specific needs.

Capacity Building: Strengthening Co-ordinated Management

Decentralization is enhancing the role of local authorities, making them pivotal actors in cities. They must be assisted in managing their city's cultural assets in a spirit of democratic governance. This involves strengthening legal and administrative frameworks to promote conservation and development, by for instance, creating heritage units within city governments, reviewing the building permit control system and training in open tender procedures in all public and private works. The inclusion of heritage issues in national law is a basis for efficient partnership, while private landowners, inhabitants and economic players in safeguarded areas should be supported by public funding. Decentralized co-operation schemes (see box p.14) have proved a particularly valuable means for developing comprehensive safeguarding and development plans for cities and historic areas.

Training and Know-how

Sharing knowledge is a cornerstone of the Convention's mandate. Workshops and on-site training acquaint local personnel with documentary, archaeological and urban planning research, recording and analysis of heritage, digital mapping systems, traditional building and restoration techniques and knowledge of appropriate techniques and materials.

Fostering International Co-operation

UNESCO's strategy rests on building partnerships in the aim of forging a common vision among the city's numerous stakeholders. Over the past years, links have been created at all levels - between decision-makers, educational institutions and the local community, between local authorities and multilateral and bilateral co-operation agencies, civic groups and inhabitants, as well as with private companies. Decentralized co-operation schemes (between Europe and cities in Africa and Asia, see box p.14) have led to fruitful long-term partnerships.

In short, resisting change is not the goal of conservation. The question is how to manage change within the overall objective of an environmentally sustainable, culturally sensitive and socially just development.

International Co-operation

Partnerships are a hallmark of UNESCO's strategy. They have multiplied in recent years – with private and public institutions, local and regional governments, development co-operation agencies, universities, private foundations, the corporate sector and NGOs.

In 1997, for example, a co-operation agreement was signed with the French Government for the protection and development of monumental and urban heritage. In 2002, a budget of some 400,000 euros plus in-kind technical services were earmarked for activities in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Central Europe, of which one fourth of the projects carried out has been for urban conservation (about 40% of the amount allocated). They focused on improving legal protection and management of sites on the World Heritage List or on the Tentative Lists, including development of fiscal measures and micro-credit schemes to support conservation. This Agreement has served to

support the institutional framework of decentralized co-operation between local authorities of France with those of Asia and Africa to enhance technical capacities to manage heritage. This has in turn enabled French universities, NGOs, public and private companies to contribute their efforts through partnerships with their counterparts in these cities.

Co-operation agreements have also been signed with Italy (2001), the Netherlands (2001) and Spain (2002).

The Italian Funds-in-Trust, amounting to some US\$ 800,000 a year, of which about 10 % have been allocated for urban conservation activities have enabled the preparation of a comprehensive report on Islamic Cairo and an international gathering of experts to support the efforts of the government and municipal authorities of Cairo. Technical supports to, amongst others, Sa'naa and Zabid in Yemen, Old Jerusalem, Fez and Essaouira in Morocco, the Palestinian Territories and Gjirokastra in Albania have also been provided through this Italian fund.

The Netherlands Funds-in-Trust, have also benefited the World Heritage Cities Programme, notably through technical advice to Galle in Sri Lanka, Zabid in Yemen, Georgetown in Guyana, and X'ian in China. It also supported a workshop on wooden urban heritage in Latin American and the Caribbean.

Signed in April 2002, the Agreement with Spain became operational in September 2003. This agreement is focusing on helping State Parties in the preparation of tentative lists and nomination file of properties suitable for inclusion on the World Heritage List. Amongst others, this preparatory assistance will be targeting Nicaragua and Honduras.

In 2001, the European Parliament adopted a wide-ranging resolution aimed at promoting the *World Heritage Convention* and assisting less-developed countries in identifying and protecting their heritage.

Decentralized Co-operation

Decentralized co-operation schemes have proven a valuable means of sharing expertise and bolstering the skills of municipal authorities in historic cities. Established between regions, towns, and supported by parks and universities in Europe with cities in Asia and Africa, these schemes typically stretch over a minimum time span of three years, allowing for frequent and fruitful exchanges, and sharing of knowledge and skills.

They have successfully mobilized resources for drafting and implementing heritage legislation, establishing regulations on renovation and urbanization, and elaborating economic and social policies around heritage.

Requiring strong political commitment on the part of local authorities, decentralized co-operation schemes enable the sharing of skills and know-how covering a broad range of urban management and heritage issues relating to a city's specific identity. Under the aegis of UNESCO, a decentralized co-operation was first brokered between the cities of Chinon (France) and Luang Prabang (Laos), in 1996, and later joined by Hofheim (Germany) with support from the EU - Asia Urbs Programme. Today, many other World Heritage cities are experimenting with this kind of co-operation, including Bath and Chester (United Kingdom) with Kathmandu (Nepal); Barcelona (Spain) with Vigan (Philippines); Lille Métropole (France) and Turin (Italy) with Huê (Viet Nam), among others in Asia. Solidarity has also been extended to African cities: Bergen

(Norway) with Mozambique Island, Lille (France) with St Louis of Senegal, Lyon and Cergy-Pontoise (France) with Porto Novo (Benin), Melun (France) with Ouidah (Benin), to name but a few of the city-to-city partnerships working on urban conservation and development under the aegis of UNESCO.

The **World Heritage Partnership Initiative** (WHPI), launched in 2002 on an experimental basis, aims to build a more effective system of international co-operation for addressing priority conservation issues. The initiative will place special emphasis on building innovative partnerships with NGOs and public charities, with States Parties that foster South-South co-operation as well as those that go beyond the conventional North-South donor-recipient arrangements.

New Information and Communication Technologies

also hold the potential to better manage heritage sites. Geographic Information Systems (GIS), for example, make it possible to translate databases containing extensive information on sites (architectural, socio-economic, and demographic) into high-precision maps, providing valuable tools for urban planners. UNESCO is facilitating exchange (through, for example, its Virtual Congress held in October 2002 from the newly inaugurated Alexandria Library) on new techniques for managing heritage in the digital age. The Virtual Heritage Network, linking together several hundred research institutions, professionals and hi-tech companies from across the globe, has been collaborating with UNESCO since its formation in 1998².

There is no single model for preserving the heritage of historic city centres. There are however, yardsticks for measuring the impact of policies. How do they serve the inhabitants of historic areas? How do they preserve, even enhance diversity? How do they improve basic living standards – access to decent housing, clean water, work and school?

Heritage, as cases in this publication illustrate, cannot be treated in isolation – it is not only about buildings, but people, traditions, identity and opportunity. The original fabric of historic cities reflects a unified vision, a purpose, a culture that must be recaptured as a foundation for renewal, bearing in mind its relationship to the surrounding environment. Enhancing historic quarters by improving housing, resolving transport issues, providing economic opportunities and social services can have an impact well beyond the historic heart.

Thirty years ago, the preamble to the *World Heritage Convention* noted that "cultural heritage and the natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction not only by the traditional causes of decay, but also by changing social and economic conditions which aggravate the situation with even more formidable phenomena of damage and destruction." Today, the Convention is buttressed by three decades of experience, numerous projects and partnerships, and a global awareness of our common belonging. At the turn of the new century, in 2000, all United Nations Member States pledged to meet the Millennium Development Goals, which call, *inter alia*, to reduce by half the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day by the year 2015. In light of rapid urbanization, cities have a critical role to play in achieving these goals. UNESCO, with its partners, will continue to promote a democratic vision for historic cities, where culture is a springboard for securing basic rights, environmental safety and social justice – in short, a more humane future.

2. For more details on VHN, visit the Network on the Internet at <http://www.virtualheritage.net>