

Check Against Delivery

Remarks
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Regional Forum
on Cultural Corridors of South East Europe
"Common Past and Shared Heritage – A Key to Future Partnership"



Varna, Bulgaria, 20 – 21 May 2005

**Mr. President,
Honorable Heads of States and Governments,
Mr. Director General of UNESCO
Mr. Secretary General of the Council of Europe
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It gives me great pleasure to be among you all in this Regional Forum on Cultural Corridors in South East Europe.

First let me convey my sincere thanks to our hosts from Bulgaria for organizing this event here in enchanting Varna. The diversity of Bulgaria's cultural and natural heritage provides a stunning setting for this meeting. I also wish to express that it is a special privilege for Egypt to be among the participants of this unique event as an observer.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Heritage, whether cultural or natural, comprises all manifestations and messages of intellectual activity in our environment. Heritage mirrors a nation's soul and reflects personal identity in a chain from past to future generations. The theme of this forum "Common past and shared heritage – a key to future partnership" has enlisted Egypt's interest and prompted its keenness to participate on the basis of its long common and shared past with this region, being the crossroads of civilizations and religions from the dawn of time.

The heritage of Egypt commands exceptional international importance and enjoys highly captivating worldwide attraction – as it incorporates the many aspects of human civilizations, and records its development over the ages, together with local and international valuable and viable natural resources of renowned beauty. The cultural heritage of Egypt in particular has the singular distinction of its spectacular and almost miraculous, colorful continuity over the span of 7 millennia.

Egypt was in constant contact with its neighbors in Nubia, Northeast Africa, the Levant, Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean World. Peaceful contacts were, at times, interrupted by armed conflicts. Incursions were repelled, but Egypt was eventually incorporated into the Hellenistic world to become a powerful center of knowledge and learning in classical antiquity. The

knowledge of Pharaonic Egypt was transmitted to Greece and Rome to spread through space and time to the rest of humankind.

As Christianity replaced the native Egyptian religion, the Egyptians developed their own doctrines and practices, their Christian philosophy and monastic pursuits spread outside Egypt to become an integral element of Christian thought and belief. The Holy Family Route in Egypt stands testament to this.

The spread of Islam brought Egypt into the fold of Islamic Civilization. Egypt, together with Syria, Iraq and Persia combined the fruits of their cultural heritage in a burst of intellectual and artistic pursuits that has dramatically altered the cultural landscape of the region. The power and vigor of this civilization was enormous. Its knowledge spread beyond the neighboring regions of Arabia to the Far East and Central Asia, and across the Mediterranean, to Spain and Italy. In Egypt, Cairo became a legendary city where scholars and artisans created a cultural legacy in all fields.

There are many Egyptian cultural properties that are of outstanding significance to the Egyptian Nation. Many of these sites are also of great significance to humanity. This natural and cultural heritage represents a unique cultural corridor that interacts, fuses and compliments other cultural corridors in the region, thus igniting new political, economic and social opportunities for the development of countries in the region and giving rise to its cultural and tourist potential.

At the heart of this debate is the dialogue among civilization. Throughout history, people have exchanged cultural experience, ideas, values, and goods through art, trade, and migration. Human history is the tale as such journeys, Cultural Corridors are yet another continuation as these journeys; aimed at achieving one of the goals of dialogue among civilizations which is to spread knowledge and appreciation of the historical and cultural background of peoples living in different circumstances and areas of the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude with a quotation from the Declaration on Cultural Diversity: "Heritage in all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, so as to foster creativity in all its diversity and to inspire genuine dialogue among cultures".

I wish the forum the best of success in its important work.

Thank You