

G7 – Culture Ministerial Meeting
Florence 30, 31 March, 2017

Culture as an Instrument of Dialogue Among Peoples
Concept Paper

Tangible and intangible cultural heritage, in all its forms and expressions, is the identity and historical memory of peoples and their ancient civilizations. It expresses, at the same time, universally recognized values. It is the testimony of past civilizations and their link with the present and future generations, the legacy of the people who have preserved and handed down to us the richness of their thought, their arts, and their ingenuity.

The recent dramatic events of destruction of cultural heritage that belongs to humanity led the international community to affirm, with renewed determination, the need to defend it from all forms of aggression, those produced by man as well as those produced by natural events.

The responsibility to protect cultural heritage implies, therefore, putting in place every possible effort to preserve it as an instrument of knowledge, dialogue and mutual understanding among different cultures. It is only through a path of knowledge, in fact, that one can share the wealth that each culture brings to development and social growth of our economies and civil societies. The preservation of cultural diversity is the crucial first step for mutual respect between peoples and their cultures.

Not surprisingly, a number of international conventions - on illicit trafficking of cultural property, on the protection of sites declared World Heritage, on promoting cultural diversity - have been adopted by UNESCO, on the assumption that cultural assets do not represent simply a legacy of the country and people who hold them, but of all humanity.

The United Nations, in particular, has brought to international attention the phenomenon of trafficking of archaeological heritage as a possible form of financing terrorism. And in another aspect, also in the context of the United Nations, an appeal was launched to consider the need to contemplate a cultural component of peacekeeping missions promoted by the Organization itself.

Voluntary and systematic destruction of archaeological sites, museums and buildings linked to religious traditions and worship, confirm that the context has changed. This has imposed a new approach capable of responding to challenges at an international level, heretofore unknown. Monuments and cultural sites were, in the past, mostly affected by accidental events. Today, instead, we see systematic forms of destruction that seek to consciously erase the symbols of national identity and destroy the historic roots of certain populations, pushing them to flee their lands.

The consequences of natural disasters and along with them the destruction of national cultural identity symbols, including in the field of world heritage, arouse strong concern. In this context, we not only have the duty to protect, but also that of reconstruction, restoration and more generally, of returning to the people and to humanity ancient testimonies of culture and national identity.

It appears to be, more than ever, appropriate to proceed rapidly to identify effective international mechanisms to protect world cultural heritage in danger, including the use of adequate expertise that each country is able provide to support its defense. In this regard, we support the idea of establishing the Task Force "Unite4Heritage" which operates under the agreements with UNESCO. It includes the use of military and civil forces at an early stage in possible conflicts to secure cultural property belonging to humanity and preserve their identity value.

The meeting of G7 Culture is intended, therefore, to bring to the attention of the more developed countries the need to sustain, in the United Nations, the presence of a cultural component in peacekeeping and international security missions, as well as to promote an ongoing intercultural dialogue among nations. A dialogue that contributes to overcoming the acute contrasts based on identity and religion that may lead to the destruction of heritage perpetrated by intolerance.

The G7 Conference of Culture Ministers will therefore be a valuable opportunity to meet and share ideas and proposals on two major issues confronting culture as a tool for dialogue among peoples: armed conflicts and the preservation of national identity. On both these issues, culture and intercultural dialogue can be a real instrument for collaboration, solidarity, growth and sustainable development in the communities that are somehow affected.