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Man and
the Biosphere
programme

Opening Keynote address

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Distinguished Madam Monique Barbut, Chief Executive Officer and Chair of the
GEF

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues,

Dear participants,

UNESCO has been actively engaged in the preparation of the Congress since the early stages and I would like to acknowledge the hard work that has been provided by the organizers, especially the Chair of the Organizing Committee, Edmond Dounias and his team. We are very happy to sponsor this 13th Congress of the International Society of Ethnobiology as your commitment to diversity, dignity and respect of differences is at the heart of UNESCO's mandate.

Our work on cultural and biological diversity, throughout our diverse sectors such as Education, Science, Culture and Communication has provided strong evidence of the importance of contributions from a wide variety of methods, disciplines and knowledge.

We believe that there is no standardized approach to the study and understanding of social and ecological systems. Our different programmes have demonstrated that local groups in different environments and cultures have developed an incredible variety of ways to manage resources sustainably, using their considerable indigenous knowledge.

In UNESCO, we are living with diversity, we are embracing diversity. We acknowledge the importance of multiple points of views, voices, possibilities,

paths and knowledge. UNESCO is currently developing a policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples to effectively implement, within the house and throughout our Sector's and activities the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The wonder of diversity has many facets and many implications. Biodiversity has received much public and political attention over the last decade. Yet, we are still destroying the Planet's biological diversity at an alarming rate. At the same time, the diversity of human cultures has come under increasing threat. For a host of tangible and non tangible reasons, we need both biological and cultural diversity in our approaches to conservation and for sustainable development. UNESCO is the guardian of several normative instruments that are protecting our natural and cultural heritage as well as intangible one. We are mobilizing our networks of scientific experts, researchers, educators, schools, UNESCO Chairs and partners to inform, educate, share knowledge and information on biodiversity and its vital importance for humankind.

We have been supporting the establishment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) as we are convinced that this is a key bridging institution to reach out to policy-makers and we are glad that the IPBES was formally established last March in Panama.

IPBES should, in line with the Busan Outcome, **“recognize and respect the contribution of indigenous and local knowledge to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystems”**.

IPBES has a unique role to play in recognizing holders of indigenous and local knowledge, alongside scientists, as key sources of information and understanding to assess, conserve and sustainably use biodiversity from local to global levels.

This knowledge, whether referred to as indigenous, local, traditional or community-based, is not static and fixed. While anchored in culturally-specific philosophies and worldviews, it remains dynamic, innovative and adaptive, and thus responds to changing ecological, societal and political realities. Furthermore, like science, holders of indigenous and local knowledge work from a foundation of experience, understanding and data, but also generate new knowledge in new settings and in response to new challenges.

Bridging across knowledge systems will be one of the major challenges for IPBES and an indicator of its success. UNESCO will maintain its efforts and mobilize its resources for IPBES to meet successfully these challenges.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We support the views that there are no such things as universal and unique solution, applicable everywhere under any circumstances. We work on interactions between people and nature, between people and people. Diversity is a source of enrichment and knowledge and may provide for the capabilities that we need to be adaptive and robust.

Our programmes and work on biodiversity and cultural diversity are teaching us that no panaceas exist.

Multiple knowledge and flexible approaches need to exist that can fit local circumstances and adapt to changes in resource availability and threats to it over time, if long term sustainability is to be achieved.

We need to collectively transcend barriers, frontiers, disciplines and divides, embracing the diversity of knowledge and methods, challenging conventional wisdoms and presumptions, welcoming complexity.

We live in a highly interconnected world, and we human beings, are part of the biosphere. We are facing many governance challenges that will be discussed at the highest levels at the forthcoming Earth summit of the United Nations Conference Rio + 20, which will be held next June 2012. UNESCO is very much involved in these preparations.

Next June, UNESCO will co-convene, with the International Council for Science (ICSU) a session during the Forum on Science, Technology and Innovation for Sustainable Development entitled “*Indigenous Knowledge and Science: From Recognition to Knowledge Co-Production*”. During this session, UNESCO with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the Secretariat of the Convention of Biological Diversity, UNDP-GEF and the United Nations University (UNU), will launch a Technical Report on indigenous knowledge and climate change assessment and adaptation.

The report will be submitted to the Authors of IPCC Working Group II, to facilitate the incorporation of indigenous peoples' knowledge and viewpoints into IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report.

I wish that many of you will contribute to these discussions and attend the forum in Rio, and I am certain that this 13th Congress of the ISE and the Indigenous Forum held in Montpellier this week will provide opportunity to share solutions for collective action.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are indeed in a highly crucial transition period of human life. Vulnerabilities and risks are high but also opportunities for socio ecological changes and transformations. Let me reaffirm you that UNESCO will mobilize its networks and resources to contribute to these needed changes and transformations.

I hope that we can join our efforts and mobilize our global networks, to emphasize the diversity of societal paths of development, depending on the particular cultural, political as well as ecological contexts.

I am glad that UNESCO, through its Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) and its World Network of Biosphere Reserves and the Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) initiative, is contributing to this dialogue between science, culture, education for sustainable development and that numerous workshops will provide the space for exchanges and for building partnerships so we can join our resources and efforts together.

Darrell Posey's seminal work raised awareness of the sophistication and nuance of indigenous peoples' environmental knowledge, based upon which they devise natural resource management strategies. The International Society of Ethnobiology, founded by Darrell, has carried on this important work.

The work of UNESCO is based on these principles. For example, biosphere reserves from the Man and the Biosphere programme are established on the fundamental principle that people are part of the ecosystems that they shape and that the ecological and societal systems are mutually dependent. The importance of combining knowledge for the management of the resources and biodiversity has been highlighted since the establishment of the World Network of Biosphere Reserves which comprises today 580 sites in 114 countries. The experience of the MAB programme has demonstrated that values and principles such as trust, reciprocity and collective action do exist in certain conditions and that when people trust each other, they find solutions, as well as the energy to create and build positive actions.

UNESCO's Local and Indigenous Knowledge Systems (LINKS) initiative is also contributing:

to secure an active and equitable role for local communities in resource management;

to strengthen knowledge transmission across and within generations;

to explore pathways to balance community-based knowledge with global knowledge in formal and non-formal education;

and to support the meaningful inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge in biodiversity conservation and management, and climate change assessment and adaptation.

LINKS collaborates with indigenous experts, local communities, scientists, governments and NGOs to implement community-based projects. For example, in close cooperation with the people of the Marovo Lagoon, Solomon Islands, a wiki has been created in the local language based on the indigenous knowledge of the peoples of Marovo Lagoon about marine and terrestrial biodiversity. Using the wiki and associated lesson plans, teachers, students and community members are working in their own language to moderate, improve and expand educational content relating to local environmental knowledge.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear participants,

Culture and Science are two key mandates of UNESCO, and their stronger interactions are much needed in our actions for sustainability. I am very happy that this Congress is opened to a wide diversity of stakeholders and providing space for dialogue between science, art and culture through various cultural events and festival. I am also delighted that tonight, Jordi Savall, UNESCO Artist for Peace will produce the opening concert of our Congress on the theme « East West Dialogue between Ancient Music and World Music /Dialogue des musiques Anciennes et des Musiques du Monde entre Orient et Occident ».

I would like to finish my welcoming remarks with music, quoting Jordi Savall's words which are echoing my message today : **“C'est là la force de la musique: elle peut apporter la paix car elle oblige à dialoguer et à se respecter. Elle rend conscient qu'une harmonie est possible à condition d'accepter des idées différentes des siennes ».**

I wish you all a productive and wonderful week, made of interactions, sharing and respect and I look forward continuing this dialogue with you.

Thank you.