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Mr. Chairman of the Executive Board,

Mr. President of the General Conference.

Director General Matsura,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor to address you today. Let me begin by thanking our esteemed Director General and the Secretariat for their dedication and hard work.

I would like to particularly commend documents 181 EX 4, 5 and 6. They elegantly summarize the activities that took place during the reporting period, in line with our short- and medium-term strategies.

I wish also to underscore that education, science and technology, culture and communications are the pre-requisites for the development of humankind, including its economic dimension. It is the position of the Republic of Serbia that these areas need to be protected from budget cuts.

Let me say, in addition, that we strongly support the Organization's priorities, namely Africa and

the promotion of gender equality. Serbia is proud of its record in promoting Africa's sustainable development in the post-colonial period, as a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement. The achievements we have made in the field of the rights of women are noteworthy, as our recent anti-discrimination legislation demonstrates.

We also underscore our commitment to educating for human rights and increasing literacy, while also emphasizing our dedication to all other pedagogical efforts that contribute to the development of societies—including the promotion of physical and sporting activities.

Furthermore, I would like to emphasize the importance of the various UNESCO scholarship and awards programs. We are grateful to be a part of the L'Oreal Initiative, and look forward to deepening our cooperation in this area in the years to come.

The Republic of Serbia also continues to closely cooperate with UNESCO in the field of sustainable water programs, biosphere sustainability, and climate change—as well as bioethics standards, placing emphasis on educating youth on these issues.

Moreover, we support the strategy for strengthening scientific capacities at the national, regional and international level, especially the Basic Sciences Program.

I am also pleased to highlight the leading role of the Republic of Serbia in promoting and deepening regional cooperation—a vital component of the democratic consolidation of peace, stability and reconciliation. We have actively participated in the annual summits of Southeast Europe heads of state that have contributed to the “cultures of peace” program. I would like to propose that Serbia hosts this important regional event in 2011.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Serbia’s national priorities focus on safeguarding cultural heritage in danger, especially in our southern province of Kosovo and Metohija, under United Nations administration since June 1999. I would like to salute UNESCO’s work in Kosovo—and in particular recognize the personal engagement of Director General Matsura, as well as UNESCO’s Regional Office in Venice. I would also like to thank the various donor countries for their help to conserve and rebuild Serbian heritage in Kosovo.

The Republic of Serbia, in a recent exchange of letters, signaled to UNESCO our commitment to the use of funds collected during and subsequent to the donors’ conference to the tune of 5.5 million dollars. This reaffirms the traditional, good-faith partnership between UNESCO and the Republic of Serbia in the area of cultural heritage, to the benefit of all.

There is still much work to be done. More than 150 churches and monasteries, including dozens that were built as long ago as the 11th century, have been destroyed by ethnic-Albanian extremists in the past ten years, including 35 during the March 2004 pogrom against Serbs in Kosovo. While some of these have been rebuilt on the basis of a process commenced with the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding by the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church, many more holy sites remain ruined or severely damaged.

One such example is the 11th-century cathedral church of the Holy Mother of Ljeviska—placed on UNESCO's List of World Heritage in Danger. Located in the old quarter of Serbia's ancient capital of Prizren, its frescos were almost completely destroyed during the March 2004 pogrom. It has repeatedly been desecrated since.

Nonetheless, its restoration through the UNESCO process will, hopefully, strongly encourage some of the more than 10,000 Kosovo Serbs who have been ethnically cleansed from Prizren since June 1999, to return to the city. For this to happen, UNMIK and EULEX must provide a more secure environment for IDPs. Otherwise, once restored, the Ljeviska church stands in danger of becoming a mere museum piece, instead of a living, active place of worship.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to underline the precise nature of the fight to preserve Serbian heritage in Kosovo—and to emphasize its universality—in the context of the danger posed by the unilateral declaration of independence of February 17th, 2008, by the secessionist authorities of our southern province.

The World Heritage Committee delayed the issuing of its decision on the Medieval Monuments of Kosovo (Serbia) because of pressures to artificially separate this foundational part of Serbian patrimony from the rest of it in other parts of our country. I would like to thank all those in UNESCO for ensuring this attempt to politicize cultural heritage did not succeed. International law and this Organization's practice make clear that such violations of the norms that have served us so well over the course of many decades can only result in unhelpful divisions.

Serbian monasteries must never become pawns in a dangerous game of identity creation. On the ground in Kosovo, unfortunately, much evidence points to such an intention. Textbook after textbook published by Pristina make preposterous claims that Serbian Orthodox heritage from the medieval period is in fact Kosovo Albanian heritage.

This attempt to re-write history must be condemned in the strongest possible terms. The international community—and UNESCO in particular—must not be passive. We all must say,

with determination and moral certainty: cultural cleansing will not stand. Not here, and not anywhere else.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me make it clear: the Serbian people seek reconciliation. We seek to compromise. We seek agreement. We want to live in peace.

Attempts to instrumentalize culture as a tool of conflict do not bring us closer. I fervently believe that only when we come to look at diversity as a source of strength—only when we embrace the view that individual cultures genuinely prosper and progress when they come into contact with other cultures—can we say that the tide has inexorably turned in favor of peace and a common sense of destiny.

To protect and enhance the myriad cultural achievements of humankind—this is a great task before us all. It is high time to re-dedicate ourselves once again to this noble, 21st-century undertaking of man.

Thank you very much for your attention.