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Opening Speech

Opening Remarks

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I wish to convey to you the most cordial greetings of the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koichiro Matsuura. The Director-General, who as you may know was the former Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee in 1999, highly appreciates the success of UNESCO's World Heritage program and in particular of the implementation of the World Heritage Convention in Asia. In May 2002, the Australian Government and the Director General of UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which aims to enhance the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, enforce the safeguarding and sustainable use of cultural and natural heritage through global strategy.

The United Nations General Assembly at its 56th session on 21 November 2001, proclaimed the year 2002 as the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage. The United Nations General Assembly invited UNESCO to serve as the lead agency for the year and I wholeheartedly welcome this opportunity to deepen and extend international cooperation in the field of heritage protection and conservation. This year the protection and conservation of the world's cultural heritage have received heightened attention across the globe.

I congratulate the Macao Authorities, in particular the Macao Cultural Institute for the initiative in organising this conference and for thereby demonstrating once again your firm commitment to protecting your cultural heritage, which serves as a source of deep national pride and as a valuable contribution to the shared cultural legacy of humankind as a whole.

The city, born of meetings and exchanges, is a symbol of cultural identity. It bears cultural, economic and social testimony to the past and must continue to



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be a source of inspiration for the future. The urban heritage must be protected, but it should also give us new ideas and be seen within the overall framework of global development policies.

To date, the World Heritage List now includes a total of 730 properties. China boasts a total of 28 properties (with 21 cultural, 3 natural and 4 mixed) inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, among which there are 3 historical cities.

The urban growth of the past three decades, its layout and role have changed considerably. The combination of population growth and rural exodus has markedly accelerated urban development and architectural activity. The urban explosion poses a real challenge in Asia. In some 25 years' time urban population will have doubled, to almost 2.5 billion inhabitants. Half the planet's urban areas and more than a third of its population will then be located in Asia.

Over the past two decades, countries in Asia and the Pacific Region have experienced unprecedented economic prosperity, increased travel and trade among nations, and by judiciously targeted investment in infrastructure, education and urban development. The economic boom however has exacted a heavy toll on the heritage resources of our countries, and has seriously depleted not only the region's environmental resources but the stock of precious cultural capital, which has been built up and so carefully husbanded by our ancestors through centuries.

Recognising that the infinite expansion of the economies of the region cannot continue on an impoverished resource base, policy makers have at last begun to turn their attention to issues of resource sustainability, public participation and empowerment. Throughout the Asia-Pacific region there is a growing recognition that heritage conservation must not be restricted to a limited number of sites of international tourist interest. We are now coming to realise that the conservation of our heritage is a general concern of national policy and part of the process of sustainable development, building upon each society's unique cultural and historic traditions. The conservation of society's cultural identity is therefore a matter of urgent concern for all who are concerned with human development.

Macao, the crossroad between eastern and western cultures stretching back over four centuries ago, was the first western trading post in the Far East. It was here that the first western-style university was established, the well known



“College of St. Paul”. The city is a unique blend of Latin and Asian cultures, making it one of the territory’s major tourist attractions. Classical Mediterranean architecture such as the Leal Senado Square, the Ruins of St. Paul’s, the Guia Lighthouse, the Chapel of Our Lady of Guia, and the Monte Fortress, to mention only these, constitute the testimony of Macao’s history, an irreplaceable cultural heritage.

UNESCO’s firm commitment is to assure the continued high quality of life in all communities, without sacrificing the traditional characteristics that make each place special and home to the people who live there. The strategic focus of UNESCO programs is grounded in the recognition that although the economic and social problems of rapidly growing urban areas may be comparable through the region, the unique social characteristics of the various cultural communities which make up each urban conglomerate determine how each city is able to deal with these problems.

The preservation of the world heritage is such a vast undertaking that, in the long run, it can only be successful if there is active participation by local communities everywhere. Heritage preservation is one development activity that can bring socio-economic benefits to the entire community through a wide range of employment and income-generating activities. By focusing on local ownership of heritage and local responsibility over its preservation and future use, we not only ensure the survival of that heritage but also place heritage where it rightfully belongs at the very centre of human development.

It is our hope that this conference will mark the beginning of an active and tangible cooperative effort from the government institutions and the international organisations to protect the urban cultural heritage and to foster urban sustainable development.

I hereby would like to kindly ask the Organising Committee to kindly consider sharing the results of this three-day conference with the other regions of China to benefit the country’s overall effort in urban heritage conservation works.

Finally, I wish this meeting great success.

Thank you.