

His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Iqbal Omar, Minister of Education of Iraq and
President of the Iraqi National Commission of UNESCO

His Excellency Mr. Fryad Rawandouzi, Minister of Culture of Iraq

Mr. Kahtan Abas Al-Awadi, Advisor to the President of Iraq for Tourism and
Antiquities Affairs,

His Excellency Mr. Mahmoud al-Mullakhalaf, Permanent Delegate of Iraq to
UNESCO,

Ms. Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO,

Excellences,

Distinguish Colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honor for me, as Permanent Delegate of Japan to UNESCO, to be here with distinguished Ministers and experts for our joint efforts to safeguard common heritage of humanity in Iraq. Last month, I had opportunity to visit le Musée du Louvre-Lens for its exhibition "History Begins in Mesopotamia." I was deeply impressed by this greatest and oldest civilization of humankind, and renewed my profound respect to archeological experts of all over the world for their tireless efforts to preserve this iconic heritage sites.

Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our heritage is irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration for all nations, religions and communities. We all share the responsibility to protect them for the future generation.

Today, the international community is facing an unprecedented crisis. We have been appalled by deliberate destruction and targeting of iconic sites in Iraq, Syria and beyond. We must unite ourselves against these barbarian acts of terrorism.

We greatly appreciate the ongoing efforts by everybody who is present here today. Ms. Bokova has been leading UN and international community to strengthen its response to protect culture properties in the event of armed conflicts. We are all thankful to the heroic efforts by Father Najeeb, who saved hundreds of ancient manuscripts from Mosul.

Japan has also taken its part. The Government of Japan has been supporting

UNESCO project in Iraq since 2015 to promote preventive conservation of its museum collections and cultural heritage sites at imminent risk. This project includes capacity-building of national experts on museum inventory, contingency planning or monitoring through remote-sensing. From now on, the project will focus on effective emergency protective measures at cultural heritage sites in those areas liberated from ISIL, as an immediate follow-up of this conference.

Allow me, in the presence of two eminent Ministers, to touch upon our cordial bilateral relationship with the government and people of Iraq. Last month, Mr. Kentaro Sonoura, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan visited Bagdad and Erbil, where he opened our consular office. He reaffirmed Japan's solidarity with Iraq in its efforts to fight against terrorism, and announced Japan's intention to make additional contributions of approximately 100 million US dollars for humanitarian assistance and support for the stabilization of liberated areas.

We also promote people-to-people exchange between our two countries. Also last month, 7 members of parliament, composed of various ethnic and religious groups, visited Japan to exchange views with Japanese counterparts and experts, who shared Japan's experience of reconstruction and democracy.

Finally, I sincerely hope that this conference will produce an excellent outcome by consolidating all wisdom and expertise of the participants under the leadership of UNESCO, which is the unique international organization to lead in the field of culture.

I would like to close my remarks by quoting Jean Vautrin, French Novelist. – in French, “ La culture reste le levier le plus efficace contre la barbarie et l'intégrisme”.