



DET KONGELIGE
KULTURDEPARTEMENT

Ministry of Cultural Affairs State Secretary Per Kristian Skulberg

Speech

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Intervention by Mr. Per Kristian Skulberg, State Secretary, Ministry of Cultural Affairs of Norway

Ministers,
secretaries of state,
excellencies,
ladies and gentlemen,

What kind of planet will our children inherit?
Will they have room to roam?
Will they have air to breathe and food to eat?
Will they ever see an eagle flying free or enjoy the solitude of a pristine mountain lake?
Will they be able to admire all the man-made beauty, and will they be able to experience a common future based on a perception of a common past pointing back to the cradle of man in the Great Rift Valley on the African continent?

It is beyond any doubt that the answers to these questions depend on the action that we take or do not take in present times and in the years to come.

Since the first World Congress on Cultural Policies was organized in Mexico City in 1982 it has been acknowledged that there are substantial limitations to a development concept based primarily on quantitative and material growth. This is an important basis for the policies of the present government of Norway.

My government strongly supports the critical reflection expressed at the Mexico-City

conference, and the conclusions elaborated in the follow-up of the conference. This conference – taking place in a country so rich in heritage-marked an important step forward.

The two principal objectives of the World Decade for Cultural Development - greater emphasis on the cultural dimension in the development process, and the stimulation of the creative skills and cultural skills in general - reflect an awareness of the need to respond to the major world challenges which shape the horizon of the twenty-first century.

Personally, I have a deep respect for those who contributed to our present way of thinking within the field of cultural policies during the seventies and the eighties. Do we now need to change our way of thinking for the next century and the new millennium? No - as far as I can see, the same theses are still valid regarding the importance of culture to development. Our task for the nearest future is to repeat - over and over again that culture deals with the very basis of life, next to the struggle for physical survival .

Tony Blair said: we have three issues: education, education and education.

I say: as far as cultural development is concerned we have three issues: repetition, repetition and repetition.

Why? Because the intolerable short-sightedness of general politics often threatens the cultural needs and the environmental basis of the life of man.

Also, in our time the natural heritage, the cultural heritage and the dignity of man are afflicted by a number of regional conflicts. The everlasting competition for the control of resources, and racism in various forms lead to destruction and war. It is my hope that our concern for the natural and cultural heritage also will enhance the protection of human dignity.

UNESCO and all of us present here today recognize that it is the long-term perspective that has to be applied. To give common political and general decisions their necessary corrections, this is a continuously difficult challenge that requires diligence, patience and endurance.

What approaches can we apply in our common efforts?

In my opinion we have three options:

The third option or approach is to underline the importance of heritage interpretation.

The Norwegian Government emphasizes that heritage interpretation is an indispensable element in the conservation and management of the world's natural and cultural resources. We affirm that protected areas, sites and objects serve the physical, cultural and spiritual needs of humanity, and provide a link from the past to the future.

The government believes that the heightened awareness and the creation of opportunities to understand, appreciate and enjoy these resources are essential to the creation and longterm protection, conservation and wise use of this heritage.

As I will underline later, it is important to recognize that there is a possibility of both a wise and an unwise use of heritage. These issues will be focused in a report that the government of Norway will present to Parliament in a few months. This report deals with archives, libraries and museums.

The second approach is to realise the need for professionals and their knowledge. I would therefore like to underline the importance of continuous scientific development and research within the field of culture. But - the insight of specialists is of little help if we do not succeed in passing this knowledge over to all decision-makers and include this comprehension in everyone's everyday thinking.

Art and culture contains all the modes of expression needed to enhance the empathetic abilities of man. Consequently, the power of culture is revealed through its ability to contribute to a development that improves everyone's living conditions.

And finally, the first and main approach must be to foster a society that recognizes, respects and reflects the diversity of cultures so that people of all backgrounds feel a sense of belonging and attachment to their own community.

For the Norwegian government it is crucial to develop active citizens with both the opportunity and capacity to participate in shaping the future of their communities and their country and subsequently influence global development.

It is furthermore crucial to build societies that ensure fair and equitable treatment of all and societies that respect the dignity of people of all origins.

In this respect I have great admiration for the Multiculturalism Programme of Canada.

This now leads me to focus, not on the benefits and importance of heritage, but on its dangers.

We must learn to master heritage before it masters us! So argues professor David Lowenthal, a heritage specialist who has taught at American, English and West Indian universities.

With good reason one may ask: what makes heritage so crucial in a world beset by poverty and hunger, enmity and strife?

Lowenthal claims that we seek comfort in legacies of the past partly to allay all these griefs. In recoiling from grievous loss or fending off a fearsome future, people the world over revert to ancestral legacies. I think he is right!

It is important to emphasize that much that we inherit is far from "goodly", some of it downright diabolical.

Heritage brings us manifold benefits: it links us to ancestors and offspring, bonds neighbors and patriots, certifies identity and roots us in time-honored ways.

But heritage is also oppressive, defeatist and decadent.

It is therefore important to explore the tensions generated by heightened patrimonial concerns. Rival claimants often seem hell-bent on aggrandizing their own heritage goods and virtues, to the exclusion or detriment of others.

It is therefore furthermore important to distinguish between heritage and history. These two routes to the past are habitually confused with each other.

Heritage is apt to be labeled as false, deceitful, chauvinist and self-serving, as indeed it often is!

There must be a common responsibility, in my opinion, to keep a focus on this fact.

In conclusion, it must be the responsibility of governments and UNESCO for the coming millenium to

- 1) underline the importance of heritage management and interpretation
- 2) keep in mind the possible dangers of abuse of heritage tailored to present-day purposes
- 3) implement policies and legislative frameworks for multiculturalism

- 4) recognize the benefits of a more diversified participation in the preservation of the cultural heritage by civil associations, trusts, foundations and other agents from outside the sphere of government.

Thank you for your attention.