Intervention by Kaori Kawakami (UNESCO) on mainstreaming the concern for culture into peace, security and humanitarian assistance

Your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to participate in this Intersessional Workshop on Cultural Rights and the Protection of Cultural Heritage, and I would like to thank the organizer, OHCHR and the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights, for having invited me to this important meeting.

I would like to start this presentation by introducing a little bit about the role of UNESCO.

UNESCO's mission is to contribute to the building of peace, the eradication of poverty, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue through education, sciences, culture, communication and information. UNESCO is the only UN agency with a specific mandate in culture, and UNESCO contributes to the protection of culture through normative instruments such as 6 Cultural Conventions (i.e. The 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its two (1954 and 1999) Protocols; The 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property; The 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage; The 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage; The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage; The 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions).

By protecting culture and promoting cultural pluralism, UNESCO contributes to the protection of human rights, conflict prevention and peace building, upholding humanitarian law and security, enhancement of resilience and sustainability, and fostering international cooperation and dialogue. But how? How does culture contribute to these issues?

When we say culture is important in peace building and humanitarian assistance, many people argue that what is important is saving lives, stopping violence, providing shelters, food, water, and not culture. We are all aware that saving lives is the utmost importance. But when we have this conversation, we realize that many people seem to misunderstand that culture is something special, something only people whose basic needs are met can enjoy; and protecting culture and heritage is about protecting monuments or stones, and something not urgent. Is that really so?

Let us imagine what the life is like without access to culture. We are now in the COVID-19 pandemic. We all have experienced, to a certain extent, what it would be like if we are deprived of culture. During lock downs, which happened in many parts of the world, you must have experienced situations where you cannot go for traveling, sightseeing, visiting heritage sites or historic cities; or you cannot go to concerts of your favourite artists, cinemas, theatres, or museums; you or cannot participate in activities at your local cultural or community centres, singing together, dancing together; participating in festivals in which you participate every year; gathering with family and friends on the occasions of Christmas, Eid al Fitre, weddings, or any other events; or praying in churches, mosques, shrines. Do you remember how many people were so impatient to go out to restart these activities to regain normal lives? – These are all about enjoying culture and cultural rights.

With these examples, what I would like to say is that protecting culture and heritage is not just about protecting monuments; culture is deeply linked to our identity and the sense of normalcy; and ensuring

the participation to cultural life and the access to cultural heritage is about ensuring cultural rights; and therefore, protection of culture will strengthen resilience and social cohesion, promote dialogue, peace and reconciliation.

Now let us have a look at how culture is affected by crisis situations – You may have seen a number of cases where culture was affected by conflicts. Here are some examples of how culture is affected during conflict times, including collateral damage, intentional destruction, looting and smuggling (slides). During conflict times, in addition to these destructions, religion-based persecution can sometimes happen too. Or intangible heritage and cultural diversity can also be lost due to the displacement of people, and the exodus of artists and artisans. Culture is not only affected by conflicts; they are also affected by disasters (slides).

But culture is not always the victim of crisis. It can contribute to peace and development after the crisis situation by offering livelihood opportunities through cultural tourism, creative industries including crafts, cinemas, literature, performing arts, etc., by providing psycho-social healing for trauma of affected populations and restoring their memory and dignity, or by promoting dialogue and reconciliation among people. This is why UNESCO advocates the role of culture in conflict prevention, peace building, rehabilitation and reconciliation, and we believe culture should be mainstreamed into these operations.

What does UNESCO do to mainstream culture? We of course work with Member States, offering policy advice. (In 2015, UNESCO General Conference adopted the Strategy for the Reinforcement of UNESCO's Actions for the Protection of Culture and the Promotion of Cultural Pluralism in the Event of Armed Conflict.) We also cooperate with various partners (e.g. OHCHR, UNOCHA, UNOSAT, ICRC, ICC, INTERPOL, ICCROM) to develop inter-institutional cooperation and synergy with our work. We also contributed significantly to the adoption of the UNSC resolutions, one of which (2347) affirmed that unlawful attacks against cultural heritage may constitute a war crime.

Regarding the tools, which is the main topic of this workshop, UNESCO developed and is developing following tools and trainings.

- First Aid to Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis (2018) for various actors involved in emergencies

- Military Manual on Protection of Cultural Property (2016) for military and security forces

- Guide for Urban Search and Rescue at Heritage Sites for urban search and rescue teams, disaster management authorities and cultural heritage first aiders (in cooperation with UN-OCHA and ICCROM, ongoing)

- MOOC training for peace-mediators on cultural property protection (planned)

- Training for peacekeepers, e.g. MINUSMA training to introduce local culture and the importance of cultural heritage protection to encourage them to respect it

At the same time, UNESCO also conducted a study on the linkages between cultural rights, cultural diversity and cultural heritage in the context of humanitarian action, natural disasters, peacebuilding operations with a view to develop a manual for the application of cultural rights-based approach to these operations as well as a human rights-based approach to heritage conservation.

What are the opportunities and challenges for our future actions in order to promote cultural rights, human rights based approach and cultural heritage protection, and eventually develop tools? First of all, we need to promote linkages between culture and human rights/cultural rights, so that protection of culture and cultural rights is discussed in a more holistic manner. Secondly, we should promote recognition and understanding of the role of culture in emergency, humanitarian, peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations. As I discussed earlier, the role and importance of culture is still less recognized by partners working in these fields, and the potential of culture is not fully exploited yet. Thirdly, we need to develop closer cooperation among culture, human rights, and humanitarian sectors. Protection of culture and cultural rights cannot be achieved by culture or human rights sectors alone, and given the role culture plays in peace, reconstruction and rehabilitation, it makes sense that these sectors cooperate. Moreover, issues of culture need to be recognized as a human rights issue, which needs to be addressed during peacebuilding, security, peacekeeping or peacebuilding operations too. And finally, there is a need to develop tools for actors working both in and outside culture and human rights domains.

Thank you very much for your attention.