

## From Culture to Cultural Rights

**Global Cultural Summit, March 12, 2019, Kuala Lumpur**

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Excellencies, Ladies and Gentleman, Friends of Culture and Cultural rights defenders from around the world,

Good morning. Selamat Pagi. Bonjour. Buenas Dias. Sabah el khir.

### **1) Introduction**

It is a great honour for me to be here with you today at the 8th World Summit on Arts and Culture, focused on the theme Mobile Minds: Culture, Knowledge and Change. I sincerely thank the organizers - the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia and the National Department for Culture and Arts for inviting me, and entrusting me with this opening keynote here in the vibrant city of Kuala Lumpur. It is not every government in the world that welcomes back a UN Special Rapporteur 10 days after she has presented her mission report on their country to the UN Human Rights Council, so I again thank our generous Malaysian hosts for their warm hospitality and express how pleased I am to be back in this country whose diversity and creativity I greatly admire. I am delighted that IFACCA is co-hosting this meeting here and broadening our global dialogue on culture, a dialogue, which has never been needed more than in today's polarized world. I want to thank also the wonderful Malaysian artists who have performed so beautifully for us.

To start, let me tell you a little bit about myself, and why this event is particularly meaningful to me, that may not be apparent from my accent. I am the daughter of an Algerian father and a mother from the United States. I grew up in between the countries of my parents, and am very proud that my nametag includes both of their home countries. My father Mahfoud was born in a peasant village in the mountains of northeastern Algeria and had to fight to go to school. He went on to join the nationalist movement and spent 4 ½ years as a prisoner of war held by colonial forces, survived torture, losing his father, two brothers and his family home in the war of independence. Afterwards, though scars remained, he rebuilt his life by pursuing an education,

specifically in anthropology, as a student of cultures. He wrote a piece in 1985 entitled “What Does It Mean to be a Third World Anthropologist?” that reflects what he taught me: That it is important to try to understand and respect cultures, but also to recognize the appropriateness of regarding any of them from a critical perspective and with a commitment to freedom. He believed in an anthropology with transformative, liberating potential. This is the intellectual tradition within which I was raised and it shapes my views until this day.

With that in mind, this morning I would like to reflect on the provocative title given to this session, and suggest the conversations that I would like to be having in this moment related to the themes of culture, knowledge and change. Then I will comment on the work of the UN mandate that I hold during its first decade related to these themes, and drawing from this work, frame some of the key challenges that I see, as well as some of the particular opportunities before us.

## **2) Are We Having the Right Conversations?**

The title proposed by the organizers for my speech is, “Are we having the right conversations?” I embrace it as a point of departure, because it is always important to start with a question when we try to figure out, as the summit discussion paper frames it, “how we can mobilize our minds to start creating our futures.”

Having open conversations, both talking and listening with equal commitment, and asking questions of ourselves and each other, are critical parts of both the cultural democracies we must build and sustain, and of all forms of cultural expression. I think of the words of the late great Pakistani cultural activist Sabeen Mahmud: She said: “Changing minds doesn’t happen in a week. What may be obvious to you and me is anathema to that person. You need that time and that engagement to hear out the other person as well as to present your viewpoint.” Sabeen was tragically assassinated in 2015 but her Karachi Cultural Center T2F – which teaches tabla drumming and welcomes debate on the blasphemy laws - remains open. The memory of her brave spirit should instigate us to engage in the real dialogue she believed in.

Of course, here at the 8<sup>th</sup> World Summit on Arts and Culture, it is not for me to tell you if you are having the right conversation because this depends on your own contexts and priorities. Rather, I think the title with its question “Are we having the right conversations?” is a reminder that it is for each of us, myself included, to contemplate this question as we begin the Summit, and determine our own answers.

Just what conversations do we wish to have here in our precious time together which so many resources have gone into creating? I think we have to seek out, not avoid, difficult conversations. It is only by having those conversations that we can move forward. Let me tell you some of the conversations that I would like to have, and questions I would like to ask. Which of our programs and strategies are working to advance toward our goals in the areas of culture,

knowledge and change? Do those goals need updating? How mobile are our minds, to reference the title of the summit?

There are other conversations to be had as well. Are our governments – is the international community - investing enough financial resources in the culture sector and if not what can we do to change that? Why are some of our colleagues in the cultural sector facing threats to their liberty and security for doing the work that many of us do in relative safety? Are we doing enough internationally to stand with musicians, artists, filmmakers, and other colleagues who are in jail for nothing more than their cultural work or who are censored, facing travel bans or worse still whose lives are at risk? What could we do collectively to support them? What can we do about global economic inequalities both between and within societies and how they affect access to culture? Moreover, we must stop trying to contend with twenty-first-century challenges using twentieth-century tools, which need updating and as a dinosaur I am looking forward to learning from the related discussions here this week. So, an additional needed conversation is: Do we have the tools we need and if not, where might we find them?

Perhaps most importantly from my perspective is the following question, which encompasses many of the others: are we adopting a cultural rights approach to our work and if not, how might we change that? There are many questions related to this one. Are we emphasizing consultation and participation, and not only preaching it but practicing it in our own work? Are we recognizing that everyone *has a right* to take part in cultural life without discrimination and are we acting in accordance with that legal requirement? Is that understood by our governments, our fellow citizens, and if not, what might we do about that? If we are already taking a cultural rights approach, how might we enhance our strategies going forward, what might we learn from what is being done elsewhere, and which issues might today represent urgent priorities to be addressed through this lens when, as Kiley Arroyo reminds us in her contribution to the discussion paper: “global society stands on a precipice”?

Responding to the current moment, the organizers of the first ever Americas Cultural Summit, held in Ottawa in May 2018, which I was delighted to attend, posed the following question to participants: “How can Governments, institutions, artists and citizens work together to help build more vibrant, open and pluralist democracies which respect, promote and protect the right of everyone to take part in cultural life?” That is one of the most pressing questions of our times. If cultural rights are to be more fully implemented, the world will have to find relevant and effective answers to it. So that too is a conversation I hope we will have. I submit that one of the most important changes needed is from a culture perspective to a cultural rights perspective, as well as sustaining and renewing those shifts that have already been made in this direction, but would also like to hear what you all think about that.

### **3) 2019: A Landmark Year for Cultural Rights**

I would have been pleased to receive the invitation to address you anytime, but I was especially delighted to receive it for March 2019 because this is a special moment in the field of cultural rights. Ten years ago, on 26 March 2009, the UN Human Rights Council established the mandate on cultural rights. For the last two weeks, I have been on a round-the-world trip to mark this 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and I am pleased the Summit is the last stop on this journey so I can celebrate with those who are doing so much to advance cultural rights across the globe.

However, this is not the only important and relevant anniversary in recent times. Just over 70 years ago, in December 1948, the General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 27 of which provided the first universal guarantee of cultural rights. These two anniversaries mark a critical moment for assessing progress made in the implementation of these rights.

I have just presented my report to the UN Human Rights Council on March 1 marking these anniversaries, and looking back at the work we have done, and forward to the challenges and opportunities we face in taking it into the future. That report is also available through IFACCA, and on the mandate home page. I would like to share some of it with you so it might be factored into the conversations we have this week.

Developments in today's world, across the themes of this conference, also make this a timely review. Embattled humanity, living in a world of extremists of all kinds, of proliferating cultural relativism and cultural excuses for human rights violations, a world threatened by catastrophic climate change which threatens human civilization, but whose existence is denied by some world leaders even while it unfolds in front of us, a world where hate is being normalized, inequalities are growing, public space is being increasingly privatized and where the impulse to censor thrives, desperately needs full implementation of its cultural rights and other universal human rights.

At the same time, there are many positive advances which must not be overlooked, including local initiatives aimed at increasing understanding and tolerance, creative efforts by cultural rights defenders to improve compliance, new possibilities for global cooperation in the promotion of cultural rights, multiplying challenges to sexual harassment in the fields of art and culture, the ongoing exercise of human creativity despite the obstacles, and growing recognition of areas of cultural rights, such as those of persons with disabilities, peasants, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons. In my report I aimed to ascertain how to magnify the positive developments while revisiting the strategies needed to confront the negative ones and would like to offer an overview this morning.

#### **A) The Work of the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights**

Before I go any further, however, a quick technical point about what exactly a UN Special Rapporteur is and does. Special Rapporteurs are appointed by the UN Human Rights Council, the highest UN political organ in the area of human rights, and report to the council. However, the

rapporteurs do not work for the UN and are independent experts. (The late Kofi Annan once referred to these so-called Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council as the “crown jewels” of the UN human rights system. I always joke that that was a polite way of saying we are not paid. But our independence is very precious indeed.) So, in my day job, I am a law professor at the University of California, Davis.

As a law professor, I always like to remind audiences of the legal basis of cultural rights, which some of you may be very familiar with, and for others this may be new. But I think the basis of legal obligation is both symbolically and practically important, though of course creative endeavor goes far beyond law. Some of the critical provisions are:

### **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

#### **Article 27**

- (1) Everyone has **the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community**, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits.  
(Everyone means EVERYONE.)

### **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Article 15.**

The ICESCR is a binding treaty which has 169 states parties, a list of countries to which I very much hope Malaysia will be added in the near future in keeping with the pledge made by his Excellency Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohammad in September 2018 at the UN General Assembly to ratify all core UN human rights instruments.

*Some relevant aspects of Article 15 include the following:*

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone:
  - (a) **To take part in cultural life;** (clearly this is shaped by the non-discrimination provision of article 2(2) of the covenant)
3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to respect the **freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity.**

As I said, the mandate on cultural rights was created 10 years ago now in March 2009. The first mandate holder was Farida Shaheed, an erudite sociologist and longtime women’s human rights defender from Pakistan, and she very adeptly took on the new mandate, tackling many of our themes this week. For example, she noted in her first Mapping report specifically on the theme of change and mobility that:

“cultures are constantly evolving, as are the concepts of human rights; and “there is hardly any culture ... that has not, at a given moment, violated human rights”.

Furthermore, “cultures are dynamic, subjected to many influences and internal debates and internal contestations, they change over time ... [they are] a fertile arena for contestation”.

In other words, culture is not a static thing separate from human beings, as some states seem to conceptualize it in their international discourse.

In the tenth anniversary report, I pay tribute to the diverse States that have supported the creation and work of the cultural rights mandate, including through financial contributions. There are many, but here I would mention in particular Cuba and Norway. I express the sincere hope they and many others will continue to collaborate with me and my successors. Advancing cultural rights at the international level is a collaborative enterprise. You can follow the mandate’s work on its homepage, or my twitter handle @UNSRCulture. I hope that you will help me popularize the hashtags #CulturalRights, #DroitsCulturels and #DerechosCulturales especially on the upcoming March 26 anniversary.

The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary report contains an overview of the work carried out by the mandate. During its first decade, it has produced 16 thematic reports. They have sought to clarify the scope of cultural rights, demonstrated how cultural rights and cultural diversity contribute to strengthening the universal framework of human rights, and recalled the long-established international legal principle that cultural rights and diversity may not be invoked to infringe upon other human rights guaranteed by international law. We have covered topics from freedom of artistic expression to socially engaged artistic and cultural initiatives, to protection of cultural heritage, to the cultural rights of women to universality and cultural diversity. I hope that those reports, available in all official languages of the UN on the mandate website, may be a resource for you in the conversations to come. My next report will examine the interlinkages between public space and the enjoyment of cultural rights, and I invite you to join me for a discussion on that topic on Wednesday from 2-3:30 in the Summit Marquee.

### **Fact-finding missions**

Since its inception, the mandate has conducted 12 fact-finding missions and one mission for the ICC: (4 to the Eastern Europe region, 3 to the Asia-Pacific region, 2 to the Latin America and Caribbean region, 2 to the Africa region and 1 to the Western Europe region). In addition, I conducted a mission to Mali for the International Criminal Court to provide advice on reparation for victims of cultural heritage destruction in the landmark case of *The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi*, the first case in which destruction of cultural heritage was charged and tried as a stand-alone war crime. The resulting brief outlines a gender-sensitive human rights approach that can be referenced in future cases. In future, I would like to conduct missions to sub-regions we have not been able to visit so far, including the Pacific, Francophone West Africa and South Asia. I welcome invitations from your governments.

I am grateful for invitations received and cooperation of States and civil society in the conduct of missions. However, a number of requests for invitations have gone unanswered and full implementation of country recommendations remains outstanding. I would appreciate your assistance in disseminating and popularizing the country recommendations that have been made which are also available on the mandate website. It is also notable how often similar themes and challenges are arising in entirely different contexts.

For example, my most recent mission last autumn was to Poland where I noted that the country's many achievements in developing a vibrant cultural life and important cultural institutions are currently challenged by official efforts at regressive cultural "engineering", and that one of the most important myths that must be questioned is that of "homogenous" Polish culture. The diversity of perspectives, approaches and views – from avant garde theatre directors to traditional clergy - and the vibrant debates I experienced in Poland are sources of its cultural richness. I expressed concerns about the increasing prominence and aggressiveness in Poland of some far right wing nationalist groups, Christian fundamentalist groups and media outlets. The apparent normalization of some of these exclusionary views, and an increase in hate speech, is particularly worrying. I will present a comprehensive report and recommendations to the UN Human Rights Council in the spring of 2020.

I was also very pleased to visit Malaysia in September 2017, at the invitation of the previous Government and, as I noted, have just presented that report. I am pleased that the new Malaysian authorities have stated that they are currently reviewing policies and laws, and will duly consider my recommendations. In this moment of opportunity for Malaysia, bold steps must be made to implement these recommendations. I hope that all of you will read my report which has been made available to you through IFACCA or can be found on the homepage of the mandate and have conversations with our Malaysia participants about the recommendations.

In that report, I note that Malaysia has developed as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society and that I received many testimonies about its tradition of tolerant and inclusive culture. I also warned that, as in many countries today, more must be done to preserve this in the face of challenges to cultural diversity at the time I visited, especially when it comes to the right to take part in cultural life without discrimination of groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons, as well as refugees and stateless persons.

I noted in my report to the Human Rights Council that Malaysia has a diverse and dynamic arts world and that I was pleased that the National Heritage Act of 2005 integrated both tangible and intangible forms of cultural heritage. However, freedom of artistic expression faces a number of challenges. For example, the bans and restrictions in the state of Kelantan that target cultural heritage practices, such as Mak Yong and Wayang Kulit (shadow puppetry), and that restrict women performing for mixed audiences must be lifted without delay. I also called on the Malaysian Government to develop concrete plans to guarantee freedom of artistic expression. Putting a stop to the rise of Muslim fundamentalism and curbing its negative effect on cultural

rights here, a matter about which many officials themselves expressed concern to me, must be a top priority of Malaysia's new Government. My recommendations have been endorsed by SUHAKAM, the national human rights institutions.

Malaysia is a wonderful diverse country with a rich history, vibrant and multifaceted cultures and a sophisticated set of cultural institutions in which many people can and do enjoy their cultural rights. However, the many gains achieved since independence and the cultural freedoms historically enjoyed must be protected with vigilance. I greatly appreciate the contribution to the summit discussion paper from Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin, emphasizing amongst other things the need for inclusiveness of visions. I must also say that while not necessarily agreeing with me publicly on all points, the Malaysian government has shown a remarkable spirit of openness and respect in its dialogue with me. I very much hope that dialogue will continue.

### **Communications**

In addition to reports and country missions, another important tool at the disposal of Special Rapporteurs is the communications procedure, under which I raise cases of alleged violations of cultural rights. I encourage further submission of cases for my consideration, including by individuals and civil society, which can be done through the mandate home page. Many whose cultural rights are being violated are unaware of the procedure. We need to change that.

In some instances, communications have had a positive impact. However, in other cases, I remain concerned owing to the failure of States to take the necessary measures. In particular, I reiterate my call for the immediate release of Egyptian poet Galal El Behairy, detained since 3 March 2018, appealing in particular on humanitarian grounds due to serious health concerns. (Please consider tweeting in support of this imprisoned poet under #FreeGalal. Poetry is not a crime.)

His release, and that of others whose cases the mandate has raised but still remain in detention, would be among the best ways to mark the tenth anniversary of the mandate. My concerns are global, and institutional as well as individual. I also renew my expression of concern for the preservation of Latin Village, a Latin American cultural hub in London, United Kingdom which is threatened by a regeneration project.

You can check the mandate home page to see if there have been communications concerning your country and perhaps assist me in publicizing these concerns and calling for action where it has not been forthcoming. Figuring out how to mobilize shame, which used to be one of the tools in the toolkit of human rights advocates, is challenging in an increasingly shame free political world where sometimes hate speech and open defense of human rights violations, even at the highest levels, have been normalized.

#### **4) Challenges in the field of cultural rights**



This brings me to a list of some of the key challenges I see in the field of cultural rights around the world. There are many others of course, and they may vary depending on context, but I hope that we will have conversations about some of these this week, and the impacts they are having on Culture and Knowledge which are cross-regional, and about the change we may need to make to overcome them. I do not have time to do justice to any of them, but want to mention them here.

### **A) Fundamentalism and extremism**

The first challenge I wish to mention comprises diverse forms of fundamentalism and extremism, about which the mandate did two reports in 2017 to which I refer you. What is striking is that these political phenomena are increasingly ubiquitous, across all of the world's great religious traditions, and beyond. Some other forms of contemporary extremism that have a particular impact on cultural rights focus on myths of a homogenous nation, claims of ethnic or racial superiority or purity, and populist ultranationalism directed against liberal and pluralistic democracy, and indeed against human rights. What all such fundamentalist and extremist ideologies have in common is an attempt to stamp out cultural diversity and dissent, to advance monolithic world views and claim singular cultures, as well as purveying enmity toward the other. Arts, education, and culture are among the best ways to fight fundamentalism and extremism. They are critical to creating alternatives, making space for peaceful contestation, and protecting youth from radicalization.

This is perhaps considered a difficult conversation, but it is one we must have before it is too late. For one national example, I consider the recent media reports in the United States suggesting that for too long law enforcement did not pay close attention to the rise of far right extremist groups, including white supremacists and neo-Nazis, and now they do not know how to contend with a phenomenon that has gotten out of control as witnessed by the recent horrific attack on the Tree of Life synagogue. The challenge, however, truly is transnational and a significant obstacle to cultural rights.

### **B) Discrimination**

This brings me to the next theme which I wish to emphasize and which is a cross-cutting priority of the cultural rights mandate, and this is the legal requirement of non-discrimination and equality in the enjoyment of cultural rights. I have been particularly disturbed by recent political discourses of exclusion, sometimes directed at entire religious or other groups. We must promote the enjoyment of cultural rights without any discrimination, including that based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, migrant status, disability or poverty. In this moment, I am particularly concerned about the cultural rights of women as women's rights are facing an alarming backlash in many parts of the world. How to achieve the full and equal participation of women in the cultural sphere must be a key component of our discussions this week.

### **C) Culture as a luxury**

Many people still think of culture and cultural rights as luxury items. We must continue demonstrating that cultural rights are core to the human experience in and of themselves, but also key to the overall implementation of universal human rights and a crucial part of the responses to many current challenges, from conflict to poverty.

### **D) Climate change**

Last but not least, I wish to mention the existential challenges posed by climate change. As former High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillai has said, “Climate change is one of the most serious challenges [humanity] mankind has ever faced.”<sup>1</sup> It often has the most drastic effect on the human rights of those who have done the least to contribute to the problem in the first place. The problem was created transnationally and needs transnational solutions.

In 2018, I considered the impact of climate change on cultural heritage, in particular. Many world heritage sites are already threatened by, inter alia, rising sea levels and climate change is a “threat multiplier”, magnifying existing threats to heritage, such as by fuelling conflicts. I hope to address those issues further in the future, including through a mission to affected countries, and would be very pleased to discuss that with any of you who are interested.

My primary messages in this area are 1) that the impact of climate change on culture and cultural heritage is above all else an urgent human rights question, and must be understood and responded to as such, and 2) that culture and cultural heritage in all its forms represent a powerful resource to prevent and address the challenges caused by climate change in a human rights respecting manner. To respond to climate change, cultures must change. To again quote Kiley Arroyo’s contribution to the discussion paper we must move to a paradigm of “creativity over consumption,” because as she notes, “business as usual cannot continue.”

In this regard, I entirely support the call of my colleague the former UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment John Knox for international recognition, similar to that in regional instruments, of the human right to a healthy environment. As I explained in my report to the General Assembly last fall, “the universality of human rights, including cultural rights, has no meaning today without a livable environment in which they can be enjoyed. “

## **5) Positive Developments and Opportunities**

There have also been many advances around the world in the field of cultural rights during the first decade of the mandate, too numerous to mention here. The report and annex provide an overview, including many national examples. We should be proud of our achievements around the world at strengthening and consolidating cultural rights. These were recognized in the statement

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<sup>1</sup> “OHCHR analytical study on climate change and human rights is now available,” March 2009.

of Secretary General Guterres to the Human Rights Council on Monday February 25: He emphasized that, “More people are speaking out about the indispensability of cultural rights for protecting the diversity of beliefs and practices on our planet, recognizing these rights as an essential tool for preserving diversity and our common heritage.”

I will just mention a few examples here. Since 2009, there have been noticeable developments in the use of human rights language and approaches in various fields of culture. A number of organizations now refer explicitly to cultural rights, going beyond the request for “access to culture” to demand equal participation in cultural life for all. Artistic freedom is no longer marginalized within the field of freedom of expression. Protection has likewise improved, with a growing number of safe haven cities for artists at risk.

The same progress can be noted in the field of cultural heritage, where policymakers and global organizations, including UNESCO, have incorporated cultural rights language and issues raised by the mandate. However, much still needs to be done to mainstream the human rights approach to heritage among diverse actors in the field and in peacekeeping and transitional justice.

There are also positive developments at the level of the UN system, including resolutions of the Human Rights Council on cultural heritage and freedom of expression and increasing work in the area by UN human rights treaty bodies which we must enhance by engaging with them. Indeed, taking the lead from the Secretary General’s important words, we must mainstream cultural rights across the UN Human Rights system and dedicate more resources to implementation of those rights.

Many civil society organizations are increasingly aware of cultural rights. I appreciate their engagement. However, coordinated international advocacy must accelerate, though I recognize that this work may not be a priority for some. I call for the relevant stakeholders to consider the creation of a civil society coalition for cultural rights at the United Nations. It is time for more actors in the cultural rights sphere to recognize the relevance of the United Nations human rights system for their work and for the United Nations human rights system to pay greater attention to cultural rights. This integration is in all of our interests. Progress on human rights requires cultural change, is a cultural question. And progress on culture requires a human rights approach and is a human rights question.

## **6) The Next Ten Years of the Mandate**

Over the next 10 years, if fully resourced and supported, the cultural rights mandate will continue to play a vital role in supporting cultural rights within the universal human rights framework. However, this can only bear fruit if states redouble their commitment to actually implementing the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur. Governments, United Nations bodies, civil society and experts should develop cultural rights action plans, setting specific goals to be achieved during the next 10 years of the mandate and to be reported on in 2029 for the 20<sup>th</sup>

anniversary. They should also set targeted goals for improving implementation of article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by its seventy-fifth anniversary in 2023. They must ensure effective remedies for all violations of cultural rights and the justiciability of those rights.

## 7) Conclusions

We all have a lot of work to do, and we must also find ways to take care of ourselves and be kind to our colleagues and ourselves. When I get tired, I think of the determination of those who have laid down their lives in the fight for cultural rights. I try to remember people like Aida Buturovic, a young librarian, who was killed by a shell burst in August 1992 as she returned home after working with others to save the rare books and manuscripts in National and University Library of Sarajevo on the day it was shelled. Expert bibliographer András Riedlmayer made the following comment about Aida's legacy: "People sometimes ask me why I am worried about books when so many human beings have died and suffered. My answer is to point to Aida Buturovic, because the two are inseparable." We must keep alive Aida's courage and commitment to culture.

That spirit spans the globe. Wole Soyinka, the first African writer to win the Nobel Prize for literature, took part in an event with me last fall during the General Assembly. He stressed the need for everyone to choose whether they stand "on the side of principles which elevate humanity, rather than degrade humanity", and asserted that the rest of the century should be dedicated to enabling the realization of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Indeed, 2019 is a critical moment to recommit to making the vision of the Declaration's article 27 and its promise of the equal right of all to take part in cultural life a lived reality around the world. Perhaps we should call this the Kuala Lumpur pledge. Let us engage in vigorous, difficult, cross-cultural conversations here in this great city to enable us to find new and improved strategies for fulfil this goal. Thank you. Terima Kasih.