

by  
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Deputy Mayor Brasca, Signora Marcucci, distinguished colleagues, ladies  
and gentlemen.

May I first of all thank you, Minister Dini, for your remarkable address,  
and for your friendship and for the support which your government has  
given not only this conference, but the whole issue of culture and  
development over many years. We would not be here today were it not for  
you, were it not also for the help of Director General Bonetti, for which  
we are very grateful, to Minister Petrone of the Development Corporation,  
and Minister Melandri, and all of those associated with the Italian  
government in this effort.

I would especially like to thank Franco Passacantando, the Executive  
Director of our Bank who has ensured that I am here. I am grateful to him  
for that.

This is a remarkable gathering in a remarkable place. And we are all I  
think enormously indebted to the municipality of Florence and to the  
regional government of Tuscany for all they have done to make this  
possible.

I should also acknowledge our other partners represented here by Hernan  
Crespo-Toral of UNESCO, who is clearly our leader in all of our  
activities in culture and without whom the world would be a much poorer  
place.

I should tell you personally how moved I am to be here. You may or may  
not know that I was born in Australia. And Australia, when I was growing  
up, was not exactly the cultural center of the world. In fact, everybody  
referred to England as home, and the great hope of young Australians was  
to go to England because that was the source of all knowledge.

I see Lord Rothschild here who, for many years, ran the cultural  
activities in England. So no disrespect to you, Lord Rothschild. But to  
me it was strange. We lived in Asia, but Asian culture had no impact on  
us. I learned British history, I was taught nothing of Aborigines, I was  
taught nothing of our local culture. I had to learn a rather distant  
British history, study the kings and queens, and as a consequence, I  
failed history and failed a lot of my studies. It was of total  
disinterest to me.

So I took refuge in music. And subsequently music became my passport. Because, through music, I was able to meet friends, develop an international association, subsequently run Carnegie Hall in New York and have an understanding that culture was the thing that united us all.

And I felt very timid the first time I came to Florence because I felt this is part of my history, but I am ignorant of it. So I set about learning. And I found, for myself, that life was enriched by this cultural voyage. It was, if you like, elitism in one sense, but it was also very basic. It was history; it was part of my formation.

And then I became President of the World Bank, and I started traveling. And on my first trip to Africa, I visited Mali. And in Mali I discovered a place called Timbuktu. I had always thought Timbuktu was a creature of my father's imagination. I don't know whether you have the same idiom in Italy, but in Australia, if your father wants to get rid of you, he says, "Go to Timbuktu". I thought it was some amazing place unrelated to reality. And I discovered that, once, Timbuktu was a great center and that Mali once had an empire that stretched to Egypt.

And I met with young Malians, and I saw them dance, and I talked with them. And for them, this ancient past was becoming part of their reality. It was their right, it was their strength, it was something on which they could build, notwithstanding the fact that they are one of the poorest countries in Africa.

And I started to think maybe culture is important to others, not just me. It may not be Etruscan, and maybe it is not the culture of the renaissance, but it is a national culture.

And then I went to Guatemala, and I went into the hills in Guatemala, and I met there with Mayan elders who told me of their long history. The fact that before the West was doing astronomy, and mathematics and working out principles of engineering, they were already engaged in these practices, and they were building vast monuments, and they were studying the stars, and they were developing their own concept of philosophy and humanism. This was a totally different culture, now dramatically weakened, but nevertheless fighting to exist.

To my shame, I saw a school that we were building next door to the room in which the Mayan elders were meeting with me. And we were building a red brick schoolhouse with a tiled roof, with no allusions whatsoever to Mayan culture. It could have been in any suburb of the United States or a European capital. And I thought how crazy it is that with no additional cost, but with a little bit of sensitivity and a little bit of understanding, we could have linked that educational institution to the history of the Mayan culture.

And so it is that over the five years of my odyssey at the Bank, I have come to learn that culture indigenous to the countries in which we operate is a fundamental base on which development can occur. It is not all related to this palazzo; it is related to its own indigenous history, histories that themselves are rich, histories that are important,

histories that form the basis for the people of these numerous different countries, and for us, of a global future.

And so I have become deeply committed to this issue of culture not as a question of elitism, not as a question of a passport to tables where people of education exist, but as a basic element in development.

We at the Bank have an interesting challenge. There are 6 billion people in the world today. Of the 6 billion, 3 billion live under \$2 a day. A billion three hundred million live in absolute poverty. In the next 25 years, that 6 billion will grow to 8 billion. And if we do not change what we are doing, 4 billion will live under \$2 a day and a billion eight hundred million will live in absolute poverty.

The demographics and the count of 8 billion is correct. The issue for us is how can we help improve the lives of the 1.8 billion and of the 4 billion? This is not a theoretical challenge. This is the next millennium. This is the first 25 years of the next millennium.

And so my colleagues and I at the Bank have tried to think how is it that we can deal with this challenge. The first aspect is, of course, money. It is the issue that we read about in terms of the Asian crisis, and the Russian crisis and the Brazilian crisis, as we put together macroeconomic packages, as we put together fiscal packages, as we talk of restoring financial strength, and that is, of course, crucial to growth.

But there is a whole other side that one needs to deal with. It is the social side, the human, the political, the structural, legal systems, justice systems, financial systems, education, health, power, water, communications, rural strategy, urban strategy, as more and more of the poor people move into towns and cities.

But there are further essential elements, and that is the environment and that is culture. You cannot, you cannot come up with a plan for development that ignores environment and culture. That is the world we live in, that is the world that we need to preserve and to create.

Let me just share with you some recent experience that we have had in the Bank. We decided that we would go out and talk to poor people. We have been out to 60 countries, and we have interviewed 60,000 poor people, 60,000. We have conducted one-on-one interviews to find out what it is to be poor, what it is that people want. And it is not just money. It is what they call a sense of well-being. It is good health, it is care of the spirit, family and community, and happiness. It is a choice of freedom, as well as a source of steady income.

And when you penetrate what they tell us, they are concerned about threats to security, they are concerned about physical survival, about crime, violence, corruption, about their weakness in terms of their ability to negotiate, to bargain, about their vulnerability, and they are concerned about their social connectedness, their need to have a social context, their need to have their culture.

A woman in Ukraine said, "Without these simple human signs of solidarity, our lives would be unbearable." It is the richness of the spirit, it is the richness of the history that these people want, not just money. They want security, they want a chance for their children, they want identity. They are the same as we are, these 1.8 billion people 25 years from now who may live in absolute poverty.

We at the Bank are deeply moved by this report. It has confirmed to us what we have thought over recent years. It has confirmed to us the importance of our relationship with UNESCO, of our activities with the government of Italy and with other partners in this room, and it has become a central element in our own development programming.

And what is this culture? Let me quote to you from the World Commission on Culture and Development in 1995 entitled, "Our Creative Diversity". It says that culture is a whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize the society or societal group. It includes creative expression, oral history, language, literature, performing arts, fine arts and crafts, community practice, traditional healing methods, traditional natural resource management, celebrations and patterns of social interaction that contribute to group and individual welfare and, of course, material or built forms such as sites, buildings, historic city centers, landscape, arts and objects.

That, of course, is a very broad mandate. But it is not something which is an optional extra, it is not something which is a luxury, it is not something that is added when you give someone money to eat. The poor tell us that all of that is part of poverty and wealth. Why should poor people be any different than those of us privileged to be in this room? These are not animals, these are people. And the preservation of that culture is not an optional extra. It is an essential element in the development process. And that, of course, is why we are so anxious at this meeting to participate in discussions with you to see how we can do a better job and how we can move forward together.

Of course, not all culture and not all history is remarkable. In a quite spectacular address at our Bank Annual Meetings last week, Professor Wole Soyinka, who is a Nobel laureate, a Nigerian, talked about Christiane Amanpour, someone who is part of the global culture, a CNN reporter, who, in looking in Ghana at the history and at the present, discovered that young girls were still being taken in as "brides of the Gods" by ministers. As they reached double figures in age, these young girls became essentially slaves on the basis that this was part of the culture and part of the history. And in an astonishing interview, she spoke to the ministers who quite openly talked about their slaves and about these girls who were treated in the most despicable of ways. This was part of their culture they said. This is something that they needed to have to deal with their sense of cultural history.

And Professor Soyinka went on to point out that "culture is a matrix of infinite possibilities and choices". He says, "from within the same cultural matrix, we can extract arguments and strategies for degradation or ennoblement, for enslavement or liberation, for the suppression of productive potential or the enhancement". And, indeed, we have to be

realistic in knowing that you have choice in culture. But it must be understood, it must be opened, it must be made transparent, and it is for the current generation to choose.

We have had quite some experience in our institution in cultural endeavors. The first is that we seek to engage this cultural heritage in all of the things we do in our normal development activities. And, secondly, we try to create activities that are especially designed for culture, like restoration of cities or cultural programs. But it is in our normal programs that culture can play such an important role. I give you some not very remarkable examples of our efforts.

In Guatemala we set up health clinics that were very badly needed. But the local people refused to go there because they were used to going to their own healers. So we had this wonderful set of health clinics and no clients. So we invited the healers to come and work in the clinics alongside the medical practitioners, and the moment we did that, we had full houses. The endorsement was there and people came.

In Pakistan, we decided that we should build houses for people, concrete houses, because we envisaged concrete houses. So we put out a tender, we picked the lowest bid, we built thousands of concrete houses, one story. No one went into them. We had forgotten that everyone there built two stories. Why? Because in the winter people could live on the top story, where they had the benefit of the sun, and in the summer, when it was very hot, they had it cool in the lower story. So we went around and added a story and everybody used our houses.

In Africa, one of the first issues that I faced was the question of literacy. In that same trip to Mali, I will never forget it, my wife and I went to a school, and we saw these young Malians learning French. And on the walls there were these wonderful posters of the French language with an ambulance coming to an accident, where the car had hit a fire hydrant, and one of the kids was calling out "au secours". The only problem was that these kids had never seen an ambulance, had never seen a fire hydrant, few of them had seen a car. So for them learning French was like learning a language from another planet. There was no relationship between what they were doing and their immediate environment.

And so now we, and the Library of Congress, and the International Federation of Library Associations, the New York Public Library, Carnegie Foundation and many others, non-governmental organizations as well, are dealing with indigenous languages, putting libraries into villages and towns that relate to the local culture.

We are also linking, in many countries through our World Net program, schools in developing countries with schools in developed countries. I will give you a personal example. I was in Uganda visiting and then traveled directly to Wyoming in the West of the United States, a state in the Rocky Mountains. I was asked to speak by the local chamber of commerce. They said, "What can we do?" I said, "Well, why don't we link your school in Wyoming with a school in Uganda?" A totally preposterous notion. The Wyoming people had never heard of Uganda, and the people in Uganda have never heard of Wyoming. But, in fact, three months later,

with assistance from a Ugandan insurance company and help from the telecommunications people, we started a program of linking schools in the north and in the south.

We now have 400 schools crisscrossing the world. The advantage of this is not that the Ugandans learn something from American culture, it is also that American culture learns something from Uganda. We have linked them from France and from Spain to Latin America and Africa. And these kids are now growing up conscious of their culture, projecting their culture on equal terms with boys and girls in other countries.

So these cultures do not need to be static or limited just to villages or individual locations. With modern technology, the possibilities now exist for interconnectedness, for the enrichment of kids in Wyoming, and in Canada and other places from activities that go on in the south.

These are issues that we need to face when we come to the next millennium. It will be a millennium of linkage. There will be pressures to have singular values, pressures of globalization, pressures of McDonald's, pressures of Coca Cola. What is crucial for us, as we think about culture and development, is to recognize that the maintenance of heritage, of culture, of individual history, is a mandatory building block on which development within countries and within our globe needs to occur.

From my odyssey of the last five years, I have become convinced that there is a world outside Australia, there is a world outside Florence. It is a world of 4.8 billion people. That's the developing world that in 25 years will be 6.8 billion people. This is a world that we have to preserve, a world of richness, a world in which the people need to build on their heritage.

We are working in places from India, to China, Fez, Bangkok, Timbuktu, all over the world to try and give people the sense of identity, the sense of belonging, the sense of family. It requires all of our help from civil society, from the private sector, from governments. But most importantly, it requires help from all of you.

We do not have just the chance to come to a conference, we have a responsibility, as a result of this conference, to take out the message and try and make people understand that culture is not an adornment, culture is not a luxury, culture is not elitism, culture is humanity. Thank you very much.