



UNITED STATES MISSION TO UNESCO

Remarks by Russell E. Train World Heritage Program September 14, 2005 – Hôtel de Talleyrand

Thank you, Louise, for your kind introduction.

It gives me great pleasure to participate with you and Ambassador Stapleton at this celebration of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, one of the great treasures of my country and one of the twenty UNESCO World Heritage Sites located in the United States.

It is also a special privilege for me later to introduce the distinguished President of World Monuments Europe who has done so much to preserve and restore the historical monuments and cultural treasures of this great continent. The architecture of Thomas Jefferson, which we shall hear about later this evening, drew on this European heritage. And, we Americans are grateful for it.

It is significant that we gather here this evening at the Hôtel de Talleyrand, a wonderful example of the great architecture of 18th century France. It is worth noting that the restoration of this wonderful building was made possible through the generosity of the World Monuments Fund and Getty Trust (both members of our National Commission for UNESCO), as well as by the Rothschild Family and the Florence Gould and Kress foundations. What a grand partnership and what a grand place this is.

The Hôtel du Talleyrand is significant in another sense as well. I understand it was where the Marshall Plan was administered after the end of World War II. We all worked together there to assure recovery and progress. The Hôtel de Talleyrand is a place for partnership.

And, that is precisely what UNESCO's World Heritage Program is about. As I said at the 2002 World Heritage meeting in Venice, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Program, the World Heritage Program is "a compelling idea that ... should not only ensure the protection of the world's unique natural and cultural sites but should help to instill in the world's peoples a new sense of our kinship with one another as part of a single, global community."

I am proud to say that the United States was active in helping shape the UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention. We were its first signatory. We have also supported the convention and the World Heritage Center for more than three decades. We did this even during the period we were not a member of UNESCO as a whole, and were indeed a member of the World Heritage Committee during that period.

We are now, once again, standing for election to the 21 member World Heritage Committee. I know from my conversations with Ambassador Oliver and Frank Hodsoll (who coordinates the US National Commission's World Heritage Committee) that our country – its government and private partners – is very much committed to helping the World Heritage Program in every way and to working hard in the Committee to this end.

In the words of the preamble to its Constitution, written by American poet Archibald MacLeish, UNESCO was established “for the purpose of advancing, through the educational and scientific and cultural relations of the peoples of the world, the objectives of international peace and of the common welfare of mankind for which the United Nations Organization was established and which its Charter proclaims.”

The World Heritage Convention fits wonderfully well into this picture. It provides a framework whereby the world's unique natural and cultural sites, located in sovereign nation states, are identified as having universal value for all mankind. This, in turn, creates opportunities for partnerships and relationships between the nation and community in which the site is located and the larger world community.

I am happy to learn that these partnerships have taken a dizzying variety of forms. Local communities, realizing tourism potentials, are helping protect the environment. Neighboring nations are cooperating in nominating and maintaining sites that cross borders. The business and non-profit communities are helping to maintain sites and to advance the work of the World Heritage Center. And, perhaps most importantly, individuals such as yourselves recognize that protection of the world's natural and cultural treasures is critically important.

Let me say a few words about how the Convention came into being. I was privileged, as a great former Secretary of State, Dean Acheson, entitled a book, to have been “present at the creation.” Forty years ago, Joe Fisher and I, at a White House conference, came up with the idea that a Trust for the World Heritage should be established. We later joined in drafting the resolution to this end that the World Conservation Union adopted in 1967.

On my recommendation, President Nixon proposed the Program in his 1971 message to the US Congress. And, in 1972, I formally put forward our idea at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment. The US initiative was overwhelmingly adopted, both there and later at the UNESCO General Conference (in the form that is now the World Heritage Convention).

The Program has, I think, been an overwhelming success. There are now 812 World Heritage sites -- 628 cultural, 160 natural and 24 mixed in 137 countries. The United States is proud to have been over the years the largest single supporter of UNESCO's budget for this program. While, as in any program, there are important issues to address, all of us in the United States firmly believe the World Heritage Program is an extraordinary success.

As many of you in this room know, support in the United States for activities like the World Heritage Program comes from a wide variety of places. On the government side, the US National Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service have developed numerous management and conservation plans for our own 388 cultural and natural national parks and 545 national wildlife refuges. They have also advised and assisted natural and cultural sites in many other countries. More recently, I understand UNESCO signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Aeronautical and Space Administration (NASA), which will enable the World Heritage Center to use NASA's remote sensing technology to photograph relatively inaccessible World Heritage sites (for example, in Latin America).

Non-governmental American organizations and individuals have also been active. A number of these organizations and individuals are members of the US National Commission for UNESCO. The Commission strongly supported the World Heritage Program and US membership on the World Heritage Committee at its recent June meeting in Washington.

Among the US Commission members active in the World Heritage Program is the United Nations Foundation, which has been a major supporter of World Heritage natural sites, particularly in Africa. It has contributed over \$36 million and generated an additional \$26 million in parallel funds. The Getty Conservation Institute has supported projects benefiting World Heritage sites and significant contributing structures within World Heritage Cities in 39 countries. The New York based World Monuments Fund has, since its founding in 1965, aided more than 430 sites in 83 countries.

Other US Commission members active or interested in the World Heritage Program include the American Architectural Foundation, the American Geological Institute, the Center for the Study of the Environment, the National Geographic Society, and the Smithsonian Institution.

Our Mission has materials on a number of these programs, and some are on display on the table at the back of the room.

The United States would welcome the opportunity to work productively with its international partners on these important matters as a member of the World Heritage Committee. Rest assured that the United States and its private sector partners are committed to the effort. Just as when we helped start the Program, we believe strongly that the preservation and conservation of the world's greatest cultural and natural sites deserve our highest priority. It is, after all, our legacy for future generations.

I was thinking about that when in August I took a number of my grandchildren to visit Zimbabwe. Many years ago, I founded the African Wildlife Leadership Foundation (now simply the African Wildlife Foundation). It is in part thanks to this Foundation that so many African countries were enabled to apply best practices to wildlife preservation. An important step forward – for my grandchildren and the grandchildren of our partners in

Africa – to preserve the wildlife and its habitat that is so much a part of the heritages of Africa.

Those of you who know Ambassador Oliver and the remarkable work she has done representing the US Government at UNESCO. Should we be successful in our campaign for World Heritage Committee membership, you can rest assured that she will be part of our effort and that we have the experience, the resources, and the desire to lend our strengths to service on the World Heritage Committee.

Now, it is my special privilege to introduce to you Bertrand du Vignaud de Villefort des Vories, President of the World Monuments Fund Europe. M. du Vignaud de Villefort, among many other things Secretary General of the French Committee to Save Venice, has dedicated his life to the conservation of monuments and sites.

The World Monuments Fund, of which he is European President, is an American non-profit corporation with projects in every corner of the world. His counterpart in the United States, Bonnie Burnham, who is also a member of the US National Commission for UNESCO, sends her greetings on this occasion. She regrets that she cannot herself be here. It should be noted that M. du Vignaud de Villefort was Administrator of World Monuments Fund International in New York from 1995 to 2003.

It is now a pleasure to turn the podium over to M. du Vignaud de Villefort.