

**Opening Statement of H.E. Ambassador Bassem Khalil at the Opening of the 9<sup>th</sup> Year of a Series of Lectures on Egyptology for the Public Titled “Expeditions to Ancient Egypt”  
Friday January 24<sup>th</sup> 2020-01-24**

Dr. Hudec, Chairman of the Aigyptos Foundation,  
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors of Spain and Cyprus in Bratislava,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear friends,  
Good evening to you all,

It gives me great pleasure to be standing before you today to welcome you and to give the Opening Statement on this unique and interesting annual event which is prepared and supported by the Aigyptos Foundation, in cooperation with the City Museum of Bratislava, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and under the auspices of the Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Slovakia.

The event that we are about to open today is the 9<sup>th</sup> year of a series of lectures on Egyptology for the interested Diplomats, Academics and Intelligencia and also the public in Bratislava, which will be titled “Expeditions to Ancient Egypt”. This year the lecture topics will focus on interesting stories from ancient Egyptian cities, in addition to providing the audience of these lectures with information on discoveries of the joint Slovak-Polish archeological mission working in Egypt at the present time.

For those of you who do not know, I am happy to tell you that there is a Slovak-Polish joint archeological mission since 2007 excavating for pharaonic monuments in the region of Tell el-Retaba in Egypt. Tell el-Retaba is in the Eastern Nile delta in the ancient Nile valley, called Wadi Tumilat, between the modern towns of Zagazig and Ismailia. This Wadi constituted a vital route between the Nile delta, the Red Sea and the Sinai Peninsula. For the ancient Egyptians it provided relatively secure access to raw materials from the Sinai. Furthermore, it secured a passage leading further to Asia Minor. Both the Slovak and the Polish teams worked together on unearthing its intricate history.

I know that Prof. Hudec and other distinguished lecturers will speak in details to you later on about that. And that is why I will not elaborate further on this issue, but let me highlight several important points that demonstrate the close cultural bilateral relations between Egypt and Slovakia.

Firstly, there are impressive cultural links between ancient Egypt and Slovakia, from discoveries of statues of Egyptian gods, to the inspiration of Dušan Jurkovič, one of the most important Slovak architects. 2000 years ago the ancient Egyptian goddess Isis was worshiped in this area (Slovakia). This shows how much the cult of this goddess has spread to become international. They worshiped this goddess in ancient Rome and in Greece. Also in Slovakia, a statue of the Egyptian god Osiris was found. All this shows the intense cultural relations between ancient Egypt and the people who lived in the territory of today's Slovakia 2000 years ago. Let me also tell you that the Slovak National Museum has about 500 Egyptian pharaonic artifacts, therefore, I urge you to visit the Museum and take the chance to view them.

Secondly, as a demonstration of strong cultural relations between Egypt and Slovakia, the most famous Egyptian archeologist and Egyptologist in the world, Zahi Hawass, who is also a former Egyptian Minister for Historical Monuments, visited Slovakia in 2016 and expressed his great appreciation for the work of the Slovak expedition in Egypt.

Thirdly, I personally believe in the strength and power of cultural diplomacy, in promoting bilateral relations between countries in all fields and in bringing the hearts and minds of people together from different parts of the world, a thing that in many occasions politics and economics do not achieve. Therefore, one of the major soft powers of Egypt and one of the main pillars of Egyptian diplomacy is cultural diplomacy.

And to put this in to effect, I am currently engaged with the Slovak authorities to agree on ways and means to bring the Egyptian ancient monuments exhibition, which will be held in Prague from June to October 2020, to bring this exhibition to Bratislava. We thought it is a great opportunity that this exhibition is nearby in Prague, so we are trying our best to bring it to be seen by the Slovak people, whom I know are great admirers of the Egyptian ancient civilization. If this took place, it will be a historical event, as never before in its history has Slovakia hosted an Egyptian authentic pharaonic exhibition. This may constitute a great leap forward in cultural bilateral relations between the two friendly countries, which will definitely have a positive effect on promoting bilateral relations in general.

Let me tell you that Bratislava hosted an exhibition of Egyptian replica monuments and artifacts in 2014 and even though it was a replica and unoriginal monuments exhibition, it was visited by around 100,000 people. So this gives you an idea how many people would be visiting and enjoying this original exhibition if our joint efforts with our Slovak partners succeeded in bringing this exhibition to Bratislava.

Last but not least, let me also mention that the number of Slovak tourists to Egypt has increased rapidly over the past few years, reaching a high of around 50,000 tourists in 2019.

Egypt has become one of the main destinations for tourism from all over the world not only from Slovakia. Thanks to the fact that Egypt now is an oasis of security and stability in a very troubled and volatile region. In addition to the unique chance to see the old pharaonic civilization which is the mother of all civilizations in the world, and to witness how these old pharaohs were advanced in their thinking and performance even by world standards today, not to mention 7,000 years ago. Moreover, the golden sandy beaches on the Mediterranean and the Red Seas which Egypt offers to tourists with a guarantee of warm and sunny weather the whole year through.

I am also sure that these events of cultural diplomacy that we are currently performing will also increase the number of tourists from both countries even further.

Finally, I do not want to take too much time, so let me welcome you once again in this opening event and let me thank you again for your presence and interest in Egyptology and the ancient Egyptian civilization, and also of the great work of the Slovak archeological mission in Egypt, which I am sure, we all value and appreciate. Allow me after the lecture to host you for a glass of wine and a small bite of Egyptian food specialties.

Thank you for your attention.