

**Address by Mr. KOSAKA Kenji,  
Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology**

**at the 1<sup>st</sup> session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the  
Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage  
27, June 2006, UNESCO Headquarters**

**Mr. Musa Bin Jaafar Bin Hassan, President of the General Conference,  
Mr. Zhang Xin Sheng, Chairperson of the Executive Board,  
Mr. Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General,  
Honorable Special Guests,  
Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

First of all, I would like to extend my congratulations on the occasion of the opening of the 1<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the States Parties to the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

As you know, diverse intangible cultural heritage -ICH- is being transmitted in various regions throughout the world.

Such heritage has been born and nurtured within the history and climate of each region.

It functions as an invaluable source for knowing the history and culture of humanity, for confirmation of identity, and as a ground-base for the human heart.

I think it is extremely important for countries across the globe to hand down their ICH, and, at the same time, respect and appreciate the cultural heritage of other nations and deepen mutual understanding of each other's histories and cultures.

This is indeed in line with the principles of UNESCO.

Under the leadership of Director-General Mr. Matsuura, years of effort by UNESCO to safeguard the ICH have finally culminated in the 2003 Convention's entry into force.

In line with the Convention, the States Parties will be undertaking from now on the ongoing protection of ICH.

It is our sincere wish that UNESCO will continue, in its coordinating role, to work to deepen the cooperation among the States Parties in regard to safeguarding ICH, amid the spirit of respect for the culture diversity.

Ahead of other countries around the world, Japan began undertaking protection of ICH and has made continuous efforts to preserve and transmit that heritage over the years.

Our Law for the Protection of Cultural Properties, enacted in 1950, stipulates protection to be provided for both intangible and tangible cultural properties.

Since then, Japan has been constantly improving its protection system, such as the expansion of the legal coverage to traditional manners and customs, and folk performing arts of various regions of Japan.

The safeguarding of ICH, which is transmitted in a person-to-person form, presents challenges and difficulties distinct from those involved in protecting Tangible Cultural Heritage.

Japan has drawn on its extensive experience and knowledge of the problems associated with protecting ICH for a while in order to participate positively on the international stage.

Three intangible cultural properties in our country have been proclaimed as Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

Japan participated actively in discussions on the formulation of the 2003 Convention, and became the third State Party.

As you know well, our government has long been involved in international activities for protection of ICH, such as establishing the UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust for the Preservation and Promotion of the ICH, and jointly organizing expert-meetings, in conjunction with UNESCO, concerning ICH in the Asia-Pacific region.

Now that the Convention has come into effect and a UNESCO-based international effort to safeguard ICH is starting to get underway in a full-fledged manner, Japan wishes to take a position of responsibility among

the States Parties and to play an active role in putting the Convention into practice.

To that end, Japan has announced its candidacy for the Intergovernmental Committee election and I would like to propose to invite the 2<sup>nd</sup> Intergovernmental Committee meeting to our country next year.

International cooperation is indispensable for protecting and transmitting the diverse ICH of each region as the common precious heritage of humankind.

Two weeks ago in Japan, members of the National Diet unanimously approved passage of the Law for the Promotion of International Cooperation on Protection of Cultural Heritage Abroad.

This law recognizes that the international contributions towards protecting cultural heritage, including ICH, as an important national policy, and sees that it will be carried out within a stronger framework for cooperation.

We in Japan would like to take the Convention's coming into force and the establishment of the new law, as an opportunity to further support and promote the safeguarding of ICH throughout the world, while utilizing our country's knowledge and experience to make contributions to the international community.

In closing, I would like to ask for the understanding and support of all Member States for our efforts towards safeguarding ICH.

Thank you.