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- 5 PANAMA
- 6 CHINA
- 7 CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC
- 8 LATVIA
- 9 LITHUANIA
- 10 BELARUS
- 11 REPUBLIC OF KOREA
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REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA
- 53 MOROCCO
- 54 FRANCE
- 55 CÔTE D'IVOIRE
- 56 BURKINA FASO
- 57 TUNISIA
- 58 HONDURAS
- 59 SAO TOME AND PRINCIPE
- 60 ARGENTINA

The first session of the General Assembly

The sovereign body of the 2003 Convention convened at UNESCO Headquarters for its inaugural session in June 2006



Mr Bedjaoui addressing the meeting after his appointment as Chairperson of the General Assembly

On 27 June 2006, Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, inaugurated the first session of the General Assembly of the States Parties of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. In his opening speech, Mr Matsuura expressed his gratitude to the distinguished guests of honour for their presence and warmly welcomed the representatives of 44 States Parties to the Convention, as well as those attending as observers: representatives of 73 Member States and several NGOs involved in the Masterpieces programme. Recalling that cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for

nature, Mr Matsuura stressed the vital importance of safeguarding ICH and congratulated the Member States on their firm commitment to achieving this goal.

It was a great honour for the Assembly to welcome Mr Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, former UN Secretary-General. A strong supporter of cultural diversity, Mr Pérez de Cuéllar presided over the 1995 Report of the World Commission on Culture and Development, which opened new doors to understanding cultural dialogue, cultural diversity and their implications for development. Warmest thanks also went to H. E. Mr Mohammed Bedjaoui, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, for his unflagging efforts in preparing the final text of the Convention as President of the Intergovernmental Meeting of Experts in 2002 and 2003.

During the inaugural ceremony, addresses were delivered by H.E. Mr Kenji Kosaka, Japanese Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, who offered to host the second Intergovernmental Committee meeting; Ms Mehriban Aliyeva, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Oral and Musical Traditions; Mr Kedebe Kassa, representative of Mr Alpha Oumar Konare, President of the African Union Commission; H.E. Mr Musa Bin Jaafar Bin Hassan, President of the General Conference; and H.E. Mr Zhang Xincheng, President of UNESCO's Executive Board. The opening session concluded with the election of Mr Bedjaoui as the Assembly's Chairperson, who, in his acceptance address, underlined the great responsibility bestowed upon the Assembly for securing the future of ICH.

Editorial

The first session of the General Assembly of the States Parties to the 2003 Convention was the most decisive event in the field of intangible heritage since the Convention's entry into force last April. Held in Paris from 27 to 29 June 2006, the Assembly marked the beginning of the operational life of the 2003 Convention. Most of this issue of the *Messenger* is devoted to this important meeting.

In the lead article, we report on the official opening of the session by the Director-General in the presence of several guests of honour and hundreds of delegates representing States Parties, other Member States and NGOs. Pages 2 and 3 feature articles summarizing the principal debates and the decisions adopted.

The Assembly first selected a bureau, chaired by Mr Bedjaoui. In the framework of the Rules of Procedure adopted, the Assembly developed a novel system for

electing the Members of the Intergovernmental Committee, which is responsible for implementing the Convention. This system guarantees equitable geographical distribution among the Committee membership. The 18-member Committee was elected on the last day of the meeting.

A busy agenda lies ahead for the Committee, which will hold its first session on 18 and 19 November of this year in Algiers. In the coming years, the Committee will have to develop, among other things, regulations for the use of the Convention Fund, inscription criteria for the Lists, and a system for accrediting advisory organizations. An intensive series of meetings of the Convention's Committee and Assembly will be necessary to ensure that the Convention becomes operational as soon as possible. We are looking forward to meeting the exciting challenges ahead.

Rieks Smeets, *Intangible Heritage Section*



Outcomes of the General Assembly – an auspicious beginning

The Rules of Procedure

After the ceremonial opening and election of its Chairperson, Vice-Chairpersons and Rapporteur, the Assembly's first task was to adopt its Rules of Procedure, which regulate essential matters, the most important being the manner in which the members of the Intergovernmental Committee are to be elected. The Assembly encountered little difficulty in adopting most of the rules, as prepared by the Secretariat. This came as little surprise since they were based on common practice in UNESCO, and more specifically on the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly of the World Heritage Convention.

UNESCO ELECTORAL GROUPS	
Group I	Western Europe and North America
Group II	Eastern Europe
Group III	Latin America and the Caribbean
Group IV	Asia and the Pacific
Group V(a)	African States
Group V(b)	Arab States

A novel aspect of the proposed rules was a proposal for organizing the election of the Committee in line with Article 6.1 of the Convention, which stipulates that the distribution of seats in the Committee should follow the principle of equitable geographical representation. This proposal was discussed at great length. The Assembly unanimously agreed that UNESCO's electoral grouping system would be used as a basis for allocating specific numbers of seats to the electoral groups (see Rule 13.1 in the box below).

RULE 13: GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION	
13.1	<i>The election of members of the Committee shall be conducted on the basis of the electoral groups of UNESCO, as determined by the UNESCO General Conference at its most recent session, it being understood that "Group V" shall consist of two separate groups for the African and Arab States.</i>
13.2	<i>(i) The seats in the Committee composed of 18 Members shall be distributed among electoral groups in proportion to the number of States Parties from each group, provided that, after such distribution, at least two seats have been attributed to each group. (ii) Once the number of States Members of the Committee reaches 24, the seats shall be distributed at each election among electoral groups in proportion to the number of States Parties from each group, provided that, after such distribution, at least three seats have been attributed to each group.</i>

The Intergovernmental Committee

Composition

The Convention provides for a Committee composed of 18 States Members, to be increased to 24 once the number of States Parties to the Convention reaches 50. It will be recalled that the Convention enters into force with respect to a given State three months after that State deposits its ratification with UNESCO. Since Zimbabwe, which deposited its ratification at UNESCO on 30 May of this year, was the fiftieth country to do so, the Convention will have 50 States Parties as at 30 August 2006.

Several States Parties interpreted the required *equitable* geographical representation in the Committee as meaning that the seats should be distributed *equally* among all groups, e.g., three seats per group in a Committee of 18 members, and four in a 24-member Committee. Other States supported the Secretariat's proposal to allocate seats in proportion to the number of States Parties per electoral group. This latter option was eventually approved. Consequently, at each election, the number of seats for each group will have to be recalculated, taking into account the total number of States Parties in the General Assembly and their distribution over electoral groups.

The Assembly then discussed whether, after calculating the proportional distribution, a minimum number of seats should be attributed to each group. The Secretariat had proposed fixing a minimum number of two seats for each electoral group, for both an 18- and a 24-member Committee. After intense debate, the Assembly decided to impose a minimum of two seats per group in a Committee of 18 members, and of three seats per group in a Committee of 24.

Some delegations went further, proposing that a maximum number of seats to be allocated should also be set. One much-debated proposal called for a ceiling of five seats per electoral group in a 24-member Committee. The discussion on the desirability of introducing a ceiling will be continued at the next session of the General Assembly. If a ceiling is established, a paragraph will be added to Rule 13.2 of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly (see box opposite). Once these decisions were taken, the General Assembly was able to adopt its Rules of Procedure.

Left, Plenary session of the General Assembly
 Below (front row), Mr Bedjaoui, Ms Aliyeva, Mr Matsuura, Mr Bin Hassan
 Right, A Bulgarian delegate casting a vote for the election of the
 Intergovernmental Committee



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The birth of a committee

On the final day of the session, delegations and observers were eager to proceed to the main item on the agenda: the election of the 18 members of the first Committee, which will be in charge of implementation of the Convention. The election started on Thursday 29 June around noon, and took less than two hours.

The States Parties had been given a deadline (20 June) for announcing their candidatures for the Committee; by the end of that day, the Secretariat had received 30 nominations. Immediately before the elections, the delegations of Luxembourg, Mali, Mauritius, Egypt, Jordan and Syria, following consultations in their groups, informed the meeting of the withdrawal of their candidatures. As a result, there were as many candidatures as seats available for Group I and Group V(b). The General Assembly then proceeded with the election for the remaining four groups.

The 44 delegations of the States Parties (out of a total of 45) present at the meeting were given an envelope containing four ballot papers, one for each of the four groups. All 176 ballot papers were returned; all were valid, and there were no abstentions.

FIRST 18 STATES MEMBERS OF THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE	
Group I	Belgium, Turkey
Group II	Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Romania
Group III	Brazil, Mexico, Peru
Group IV	China, India, Japan, Viet Nam
Group V(a)	Gabon, Nigeria, Senegal
Group V(b)	Algeria, United Arab Emirates

Terms of office

In principle, the term of the members of the Committee is four years; the Convention stipulates, however, that for the sake of continuity, half of the membership shall be renewed every two years. For that reason, after the first election, lots have to be drawn to select the members who will serve for only two years on the Committee. The General Assembly decided that this one-time procedure will take place at its first extraordinary session (9 November).

The Fund for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

The General Assembly discussed the contribution of States Parties to the Fund for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Unanimously, the General Assembly agreed to set that contribution at 1 per cent of the States Parties' contribution to the regular budget of UNESCO. In doing so, the General Assembly implemented Article 26.1 of the Convention, while using the maximum percentage allowed. Based on the current ratification status, annual contributions to the Fund will total approximately US \$ 1,100,000.

The Assembly also agreed to align the collection of the contribution with the biennial system of UNESCO; it decided that the obligation to contribute to the Fund for all States Parties starts from the moment the Convention enters into force for them.

Guidelines for the use of the Fund will be prepared by the Intergovernmental Committee, but the Convention gives some preliminary indications on priority areas to be financed from the Fund, including international assistance for the safeguarding of the heritage inscribed on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, the preparation of inventories by States Parties, and support for safeguarding programmes, projects and activities.

Extraordinary session of the General Assembly: Paris, 9 November 2006

For the purpose of electing six additional States Members of the Committee, the General Assembly decided to convene a short extraordinary session at UNESCO Headquarters. The items on the provisional agenda include: a final discussion on a possible maximum number of seats to be allocated to each of the electoral groups at the elections of the Intergovernmental Committee; the election of the six additional Committee members; and the selection by lot of half of the 24 members who will sit on the Committee for a two-year period.

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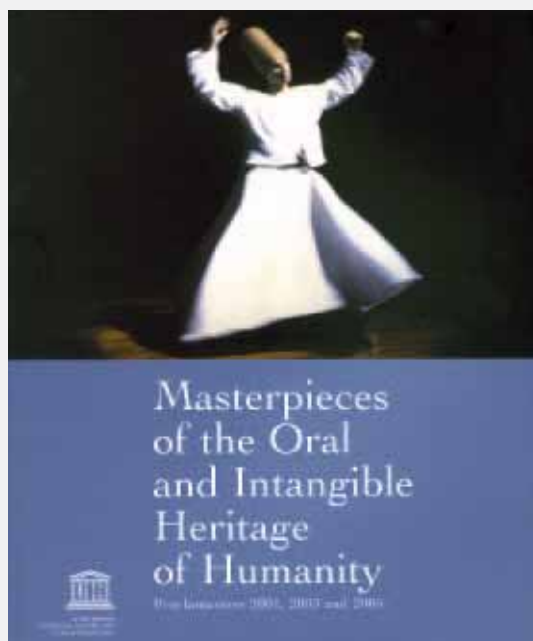
CALENDAR

9 NOVEMBER First extraordinary session of the General Assembly of the States Parties to the 2003 Convention. UNESCO, Paris.

18-19 NOVEMBER First session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. Algiers, Algeria.

For further information, contact: ich@unesco.org

JUST PUBLISHED



In June, the Intangible Heritage Section published a 107-page booklet devoted to the 90 Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity proclaimed in 2001, 2003 and 2005. Ranging from rituals, performances and oral traditions, to social practices, craftsmanship, traditional knowledge, and cultural spaces, these Masterpieces hail from all corners of the globe and reflect the stunning diversity of the world's intangible cultural heritage. The booklet is illustrated with over 100 full-colour photographs and features enlightening explanations of each Masterpiece.

The publication was made possible thanks to the financial support of the Japanese Government within the framework of the project entitled "Preparatory and Follow-up Activities for the Third Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity". The English and French versions are already available, and the Spanish and Japanese translations are in preparation. An Arabic version, funded by the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture & Heritage (United Arab Emirates), is also planned. Electronic versions can be consulted and downloaded on the new ICH website (www.unesco.org/culture/ich_convention). A limited number of booklets are available upon request.

Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. Proclamations 2001, 2003 and 2005. Published by the Intangible Heritage Section, UNESCO Culture Sector, Paris. June 2006.

LIVING HERITAGE NEWS

Fulfilling its mandate as an international clearinghouse for the intangible cultural heritage, UNESCO creates a new website and documentation centre

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE WEBSITE
www.unesco.org/culture/ich_convention

On the occasion of the first session of the General Assembly in June 2006, the Intangible Heritage Section launched a new website highlighting UNESCO's activities in the field of ICH.

What is the purpose of the website?

The new website aims to be a virtual clearinghouse for the promotion and safeguarding of intangible heritage worldwide in the framework and spirit of the 2003 Convention.

Who is our audience?

The site is meant to be a versatile resource for the general public and all those interested in safeguarding and disseminating information on ICH: government officials, NGOs, teachers and students and members of concerned communities, teachers, students and the media.

What can be found on the website?

Information about:

- ◆ the history and further development of the Convention, FAQ;
- ◆ the functioning of the Convention: States Parties, statutory organs and their meetings, international assistance etc.;
- ◆ safeguarding programmes, good practices, and projects;
- ◆ ICH-related legislation, policies, specialized institutions, projects and activities in various countries. These country profiles are continuously updated.

How can I contribute to the website?

States Parties, NGOs and other stakeholders are invited to send us relevant information on institutions, measures and good practices concerning the recognition, promotion and safeguarding of ICH in their countries. Our staff will update the website accordingly. We are aware that the text of the 2003 Convention is being translated into many languages and will be happy to publish them on our website. Please contact us at ich@unesco.org

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE DOCUMENTATION CENTRE TO OPEN IN AUTUMN 2006

In addition to launching the new website, the Intangible Heritage Section will open a documentation centre devoted to ICH this autumn. At the new centre, located at UNESCO Headquarters (Bonvin building, 9th floor), the visitors can consult:

- ◆ documents on expert meetings, intergovernmental meetings and UNESCO's programmes in the field of ICH, such as the Masterpieces programme and Living Human Treasures;
- ◆ information on ICH-related activities and programmes worldwide;
- ◆ articles, brochures, books, videos, CD-ROMs, DVDs, and other material collected in recent years from various sources and arranged by country.

The Intangible Heritage Section welcomes contributions of any type of ICH-related material. The ICH Documentation Centre will be open to the public from 9.30 am to 1 pm on UNESCO working days. We look forward to your visit. For further information, contact ich@unesco.org