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**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,  
on the occasion of the first extraordinary session  
of the General Assembly of the States Parties  
to the Convention for the Safeguarding  
of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**UNESCO, 9 November 2006**

Mr Chairperson of the General Assembly,  
Distinguished Members of the Intergovernmental Committee,  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished Representatives of the States Parties,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you for the opening of the first extraordinary session of the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, only a few weeks after the first General Assembly of the States Parties, held from 27 to 29 June 2006.

Even though this meeting will be particularly short, it is a real joy to welcome the representatives of the States Parties and of the observer Member States to UNESCO.

I sincerely regret that your Chairperson, Mr Bedjaoui, is unable to join us today, but I am delighted that I will meet him in a few days' time in Algiers, on the occasion of the first session of the Intangible Heritage Committee.

I would like to extend a particularly warm welcome to your Rapporteur, Mr O. Faruk Loğoğlu of Turkey, the four Vice-Chairpersons, representing Brazil, Ethiopia, India and Romania, and the 18 States Members elected to the Committee last June.

Today's extraordinary session has been convened because, to my great satisfaction, more than 50 States have become party to the Convention, even before the first meeting of the Committee.

In fact, the Convention now has 60 States Parties, and six will be joining them shortly, since they have recently deposited their instrument of ratification with UNESCO.

According to Article 5.2 of the Convention, the Committee shall be composed of 24 members once the number of States Parties reaches 50, which it did when Zimbabwe deposited its instrument of ratification on 30 May 2006.

You will therefore be electing six additional States Members to the Committee, and I wish the candidates every success.

However, before the election is held, the question of the distribution of the Committee's seats among the electoral groups will have to be settled. You will recall that the General Assembly, at its June session, adopted its Rules of Procedure while leaving open the possibility in Rule 13.2 of adding an upper limit for the number of seats per group. I am very glad that the Assembly has already decided on a minimum of three seats per electoral group. In my view, this ensures the proper application of Article 6.1, which stipulates that "[t]he election of States Members of the Committee shall obey the principles of equitable geographical representation and rotation." I hope therefore that you can reach a consensus, in the same spirit, on the idea of an upper limit.

Lastly, as an exceptional measure and pursuant to Article 6.3 of the Convention, the 12 States Members whose term of office is limited to two years will be chosen by lot.

Once you have completed your work, everything will be ready for the Committee, which is meeting in Algiers on 18 and 19 November 2006, to begin the long and weighty task of drawing up a set of operational directives for the implementation of the Convention.

These documents will be submitted for your approval at a future session, probably next autumn.

The Committee will probably need at least one extraordinary session in the coming months to fulfil its complex task.

But I am confident that, if we continue to work at the sustained pace we have adopted, we will undoubtedly be able to make the first inscriptions on the Representative List of the Intangible Heritage of Humanity in autumn 2008.

This will be for me, as for all the Member States who have ardently desired the adoption of the Convention, a moment of great emotion and profound satisfaction.

Thank you.