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**Address by Ms Irina Bokova,  
Director-General of UNESCO,  
at the closure of the third session  
of the General Assembly of the States Parties to the Convention  
for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**UNESCO, 24 June 2010**

Mr Chairperson of the General Assembly,  
Mr Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Committee,  
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here with you for the closure of the third session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The presence of so many eminent personalities at the Assembly, including several ministers of culture, shows the importance you attach to the Convention and the considerable impetus you wish to give it.

This provides me with the opportunity to thank the 24 Committee members, who have worked tirelessly over the last two years. You have just elected the 12 new Committee members. I would like to extend my congratulations to them and am convinced that they too will contribute to the implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

As most of you are aware, I maintain a very special relationship with the Convention, since I chaired the Intangible Heritage Committee at its second extraordinary session, held in Sofia in February 2008, at the time when it was completing its draft Operational Directives.

I have therefore followed very closely the progress made in recent months. I must admit that I am impressed by the achievements of the last two years. At the

previous session of the General Assembly, the Convention had 93 States Parties – a number that has now risen to 123.

Such enthusiasm demonstrates that the Convention meets a profound need, experienced throughout the world, to recognize, enhance and safeguard the outstanding living heritage of every single community, down to the smallest.

The intangible heritage is an abundance of gestures, sounds, words, messages, celebrations and traditions which form a polyphonic song of humanity. It is the trace and breath of all the human groups that make up in the fabric of our history. The intangible heritage is also all the varied, infinite, living, overwhelming expressions that display our relationship to the Earth and the universe.

I would say, therefore, that the attention given to the intangible heritage provides each one of us with the possibility of further exploring the meaning of our own identity. Moreover, better self-knowledge and a greater sense of accomplishment and belonging are much more conducive to looking to and accepting others.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

By conducting an in-depth analysis and review of the Operational Directives adopted two years ago, the States Parties have demonstrated foresight. This will improve the way in which each State may benefit from the Convention.

I perceive our commitment to the intangible heritage as an act of solidarity, respect and understanding of others. The Convention provides a forum for discovering and encountering expressions particular to cultures throughout the world. It opens up many paths revealing endless human perspectives, all of which are given equal attention.

Music is one of the countless illustrations of this common, multifaceted, infinite, constantly renewed cultural diversity which, at the same time, arises from the same human inspiration, the same tide of sensitivities.

I have just returned from Istanbul, where the South-East European Heads of State chose as the theme of their eighth Summit “Music as a metaphor of intercultural dialogue”. I participated in extremely fruitful discussions in which music was granted

credibility to establish a new, powerful form of dialogue extending beyond all borders.

In the same way as music, the intangible heritage as a whole is a quintessential medium of communication, a source of knowledge and understanding of others at a very sensitive and subtle level. In the light of all its constituent and interrelated aspects, the intangible heritage is a source of dialogue, peace and progress.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I assumed my duties as Director-General in November last year, I pledged to enhance the capacities of Member States so that they would be able to participate more fully in all of UNESCO's programmes. I am particularly pleased to see that you share this goal with regard to the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, as you have so amply demonstrated during this General Assembly.

There is still much to do if we are to successfully preserve the world's rich tapestry of living cultural expressions and practices. To ensure that the objectives of the Convention become a reality, capacity-building – in such areas as the preparation of inventories, or the drafting of legislation – is therefore vital.

I would like to take this opportunity to warmly thank again all the States and regions that have supported, and continue to support, UNESCO's efforts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage. I would like to cite in particular Bulgaria, China, Cyprus, Flanders, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Spain and the United Arab Emirates, with whom I am delighted to be signing the creation of a US \$2 million dollar fund-in-trust shortly after this meeting.

Regional category 2 centres for the intangible heritage – which are being set up in all regions – are also very important tools for advancing co-operation.

I am grateful that you decided to create a sub-fund within the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, to reinforce the capacities of the Secretariat.

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Convention will soon celebrate its tenth anniversary. I am delighted that the Assembly has begun discussing how to mark this special event. The anniversary will be an excellent opportunity to highlight the importance of intangible heritage and its safeguarding, particularly with respect to development and social cohesion.

You are aware of my conviction that culture plays a central role in the development process, and that this role has tended to be overlooked by international organizations and countries. I will be making the case for culture at the High-Level Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly to review the Millennium Development Goals in New York in September. I also plan to launch several major initiatives to demonstrate culture's contribution to development in a concrete way. The Convention states clearly in its preamble: "intangible heritage is a guarantee of sustainable development". It is time for us to transform these words into a commitment on the part of the international community – into a commitment that will be acted upon.

In this International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, let us also seize the opportunities the Convention offers to promote greater understanding between cultures, appreciation of cultural diversity, and recognition of the many common characteristics that different cultures share.

I am convinced that this understanding is the key to more harmonious international relations, and greater cooperation towards the peaceful coexistence of all nations.

Thank you for your attention.