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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the Closing Ceremony
of the 4th session of the Intergovernmental
Committee for the Safeguarding
of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi,

2 October 2009

Honourable Ministers,

Mr Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Committee,

Mr Director-General of the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage,

Mr Executive Director of Arts and Culture at the Ministry of Culture,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to address this ceremonial closing of the fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

It has been an intense and important session, attended by many Ministers of Culture, dignitaries, non-governmental organizations, experts and community representatives from all regions of the world, eager to listen to the Committee's debates and witness history as it made the first inscriptions to the two Lists established by the Convention. Indeed, I wish to take this opportunity to convey my warmest congratulations to all those States Parties whose living expressions now appear on the Lists, as well as the register of good practices.

Earlier this afternoon, I travelled to Al Ain to pay a courtesy call on His Highness Sheikh Hamid Bin Zayed Al Nayhan, who warmly welcomed me. I expressed my profound thanks on behalf of UNESCO for the United Arab Emirates' generous hospitality.

I would like to thank the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage and its Director-General, Mr Mohamed Khalaf Al-Mazroi for hosting this superbly organized

Committee session, and for his announcement of a US\$2 million donation to UNESCO for safeguarding the intangible heritage of the world. Please convey our gratitude to your Chairman, His Highness Sheikh Sultan Bin Tahnoun Al Nayhan.

Allow me also to extend special thanks to Mr Awad Ali Saleh, for your remarkable stewardship and active involvement in the Committee's work from its first session in 2006. Since your election as its Chairperson in Istanbul last year, you have come often to UNESCO Headquarters, personally assisting the Subsidiary Body and doing everything possible to ensure the success of this session. We appreciate your dedication. Shoukran jazilan.

Our gathering here is highly symbolic of the strong bilateral cooperation between UNESCO and the UAE in the field of culture. Not only are the country's authorities' powerfully committed to safeguarding diverse forms of heritage, they have made tremendous efforts in the domain of living cultural expressions.

The country has played an active role both in the implementation of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and in the Intergovernmental Committee since its establishment in 2006 – first as a member, then as Vice Chair and now as its Chairperson.

I cannot let this occasion pass without also expressing my own and UNESCO's gratitude to all the other Member States who have generously hosted the Committee's sessions, both Ordinary and Extraordinary held outside Headquarters: Algeria; China; Japan; Bulgaria; and Turkey. Let me also express my thanks to the Government of Kenya for generously offering to host your fifth session next year. Thank you very much.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

When I was elected Director-General of UNESCO in 1999, a Convention devoted to intangible cultural heritage was a dream for me. Coming from a region which gives equal attention and care to both tangible and intangible heritage, and having started my Japanese diplomatic career in Africa in the 1960's, I was surprised, at my arrival in UNESCO, to note the relatively low priority given to living heritage

compared to the strong focus on the tangible part of the worlds' cultures. Over the past ten years, far-reaching and noble achievements have been attained.

As I mentioned earlier today in my address to the Committee, one of my greatest concerns was to make the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage one of UNESCO's priorities. But the road was not easy – it was marked by long, heated, but always fascinating, debates during the experts' and intergovernmental meetings that paved the way towards the Convention. Along that journey, awareness grew about the countless age-old traditions that were in danger of disappearing. Fortunately, through the forum provided by UNESCO, the international community clearly decided that the time had come to act.

What began as a concept has blossomed into a reality here in Abu Dhabi, after 10 years of relentless efforts. It is an accomplishment of which I am particularly proud. Yet, as I said this morning, there are a number of areas that require further attention and action on the part of States Parties. I hope these will be addressed soon, in particular by taking measures to ensure that the Representative List is truly representative on a global basis.

Countries that ratify this Convention agree to develop policies and legislation to ensure the viability of the living heritage of communities, groups and individuals on their territory. In addition, they undertake to promote living heritage by carrying out inventories, making their citizens aware of its importance and encouraging its study. Efforts to safeguard intangible heritage can be instrumental in helping communities grapple with the challenges of globalization, not only by preserving the values and practices that define their way of life, but also in promoting respect for other cultural traditions. For this reason, they enable people to engage with cultural differences and help build social harmony.

Although I will be leaving UNESCO in a few weeks, you may be sure that I will continue to follow the development of the Convention. Before then, I want to appeal to all States Parties to do their utmost to keep it strong and credible.

I would like to conclude by reiterating my profound appreciation and gratitude to the authorities of the UAE for their invitation, their wonderful and generous hospitality and above all for their steadfast support for UNESCO and our common cause of

safeguarding the invaluable intangible heritage of humanity. This is the first and foremost goal of the 2003 Convention.

I am therefore particularly happy that one of my last official overseas visits as Director-General of UNESCO should be here to Abu Dhabi, capital of the UAE, and have as its focus intangible cultural heritage.

Thank you very much for your attention.