

MEDLIHER - Mediterranean Living Heritage

Contribution to implementing the
Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage
in Mediterranean partner States

**NATIONAL ASSESSMENT
OF THE STATE OF SAFEGUARDING INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE IN
SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC**

(MEDLIHER Project – Phase I)

MEDLIHER – Phase I

Assessment of the State of Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Syrian Arab Republic

Prepared under the responsibility of the Syrian Ministry of Culture

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Executive summary

The Mediterranean Living Heritage (MEDLIHER) project seeks to assess and strengthen national capacities for implementing the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. This document, prepared under the responsibility of the National Ministry of Culture, concludes for the Syrian Arab Republic the assessment phase of that project.

Syria's diverse cultural environment exhibits a vibrant range of ICH across all the domains in the 2003 Convention. Today, however, the viability of that heritage is often threatened by the pressures of urbanisation and modernisation, among others.

Part A of this report outlines institutions and activities and legal or administrative measures contributing to the safeguarding of ICH in the Syrian territory. Most safeguarding efforts in Syria are currently aimed at documentation, but there is also considerable evidence of promotion, education and awareness-raising activities. We do not currently have legislation specifically designed to safeguard ICH or an inventory of our ICH. However, officials in the Ministry of Culture (the Directorate of Popular Heritage) and in the Governorates are working closely with academic and community organisations, local cultural centres and individuals to implement the National Work Plan for Collecting, Registering and Documenting National Popular Cultural Heritage.

Part B presents our case study: the Dzikr al-Qadiriya of Aleppo. This weekly ceremony of the al-Qadiriya Sufi order is characterised by singing, incantations and movements, through which the order's followers or murids seek spiritual relationship with God.

The assessment was based on data gathered through questionnaires, discussions and written submissions. Data was received from the Ministries of Tourism and Culture, from Directorates of Culture within most Governorates, and from non-governmental organisations and individual researchers across Syria (see Annex 1 and 2 for summaries of information received on organisations and activities respectively; see Annex 3 for a preliminary bibliography). Data collection is ongoing. Many organisations spoke of the financial and skills constraints they faced in the performance of their safeguarding activities.

Part C outlines main priorities for future activities, which are (i) capacity building for inventorying and safeguarding, (ii) starting up the actual inventorying process, (iii) preparing nomination files for inscription of Syrian ICH on the lists of the UNESCO Convention, and also developing and implementing safeguarding plans for endangered ICH, and developing a centralised documentation centre that will assist in the collection of information on Syrian ICH. Annex 4 presents a Guide for the information of those engaged in inventorying and nomination exercises in Syria until such time as more extensive material is made available by UNESCO in Arabic.

Part A

Legislative, Regulatory and Other Measures Available for the Implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Introduction

The Syrian Arab Republic, al-Jamhouriya al Arabia as-Souriya, is a presidential republic with a unicameral parliament, the People's Council. The Arab Socialist Resurrection Party (Baath Party) is the dominant political party. H.E. Dr. Bashar al-Assad has been President of the country since 2000.

Syria has a surface area of 185,180 square kilometres and its population is almost 22 million. The country is divided into fourteen Governorates that are, in their turn, divided into districts. The Governorates are headed by a Governor who is assisted by an elected provincial council. The capital, Damascus, together with the surrounding area, constitutes a Governorate on its own.



Urban dwellers constitute about 55% of the total population and their proportion of the total is rapidly increasing. Damascus has a population of about 1.7 millions , Rural Damascus 2.6 millions. Aleppo a major industrial and cultural centre in the North (population 4.6 millions). Other major towns are Homs (1.7 million), Latakia (975,000), a major port on the Mediterranean, as is Tartous, and Deir ez-Zor (population 1.1 million) located on the Euphrates River in the East.

The official language of Syria is Standard Arabic and all Syrians speak Arabic. The literacy rate is around 80%. In daily life most Syrians speak local dialects of Arabic that are fairly close to each other, such as Levantine Bedawi, Mesopotamian (Furat), Najdi (East Syria), North-Mesopotamian.

Syria is rich in monuments and places that bear testimony to its long history; Syrian towns are among the oldest in the world. Syria so far has five World Heritage sites:

1. Ancient City of Damascus, inscribed in 1979;
2. Ancient City of Bosra, inscribed in 1980;
3. Site of Palmyra, inscribed in 1980;
4. Ancient City of Aleppo, inscribed in 1986;
5. Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din, inscribed in 2006.

Significant elements of intangible heritage in Syria include the following:

1. Oral traditions and expressions such as Hikaye, storytelling within the family; Al-Hakawati, (interactive) story reading performed in coffeehouses; Zajal, oral poetry contests; Qasid, oral poetry among Bedouins; and the Box of the World children's entertainment, with most of these genres being performed in dialectal Arabic;
2. Performing arts, such as various form of traditional classical and popular music (Al-Qudud, Arada); dance (the Samah dance, and various regional Dabkas); and performances (Karakoz shadow theatre and sword-dancing);
3. Social practices, rituals and festive events (Eids) such as the main Muslim festivities, Greater and Smaller Bayram; Al-Mawlid Al-Nabawi (the Birth of the Prophet); Islamic New Year; and the main Christian festivities (Christmas and Easter); other seasonal celebrations such as Nowruz festivities (21 March, coinciding with Mother Festivity); Eid Al-Khodr/Saint George day on the 6th of May; the Al-Yawza festivity in early September, marking the beginning of harvest; Bedouin and other local traditions, such as Al-Samer, a dancing Bedouin celebration; and Al-Musana'a, a Bedouin practice in the Jolan area; traditional methods for resolving conflicts; for the Eids Al-Zahouriah and Al-Qawzala, see below in section A.5.
4. Knowledge related to nature and the universe, including traditional agricultural practices, such as methods of dividing river water for irrigation; midwifery; traditional healing and medicine by Attars; and knowledge about solar and lunar eclipses;
5. Traditional craftsmanship, such as copperware; the making of wood appliances and carving; embroidery; rug-making and weaving; making of adobe houses and stonemasonry; manufacture of iron tilling and other agricultural instruments; the traditional production of straw chairs; frying-pans and other pottery; brocade production; silk handkerchiefs and scarves; laurel soap; basil-stalk bowls; traditional foodways; and various culinary and other traditions such as cheese-making, olive oil (Khareej) tobacco production, the distillation of grapes, wood appliances and wood coal.

These domains of ICH encompass ICH across Syria, but there are regional differences in the elements themselves and in their viability as living heritage today. A considerable amount of ICH in Syria is threatened by the pressures of urbanisation and modernisation. In Deir ez-Zor, for example, successive waves of new settlers came into the city from the surrounding countryside because of severe droughts in the late 1950s and 1990s, losing touch with many agricultural traditions in the process. In Homs, pottery and copperware production are among the few remaining viable living handicrafts. In Daraa Governorate the living heritage elements considered endangered include the role of traditional judges on matters of land and blood disputes and ancient Hourani songs.

Many elements of Syrian ICH stem from traditions that are widely practiced in the Middle East and/or the Arab World.

A.1 Institutional capacities for safeguarding ICH

A.1.a Bodies involved in safeguarding

There are several bodies specifically established for ICH safeguarding in Syria.

Some of these bodies, such as the Al-Furat Folkloric Musical Group, the Umayyad Group, the Manbej Folk Arts Band and the Jarablos Heritage Revival Troupe conduct performances of traditional music, singing and dance. There are several folk bands in Daraa associated with local cultural centres that perform folk performance arts and inform the Ministry of Culture about these performance arts:

1. Sahal Houran Band (affiliated with the Arab Cultural Centre in Daraa);
2. Tafas Folk Arts Band (affiliated with the Arab Cultural Centre in Tafas);
3. Harak band (affiliated with the Arab Cultural Centre in Harak);
4. Taseel Band (affiliated with the Cultural Station at Taseel).

Singers like Mohammed Hallaq, Ibrahim Saqr (who sings in the North Levantine dialect of Arabic) and Adib Rahhal continue to sing traditional songs in Latakia. Al-Baath Party's Youth Group in Latakia also perform folk dances during public occasions and celebrations.

Aleppo and Damascus are major centres of Arabic traditional and classic music, such as the famous religious and secular poetic-musical genres *Muwashshah*, *Qudud* and *Maqam*. Many iconic Arab musicians like Sayed Darwish and Mohammed Abdel Wahab visited Syria to learn from its cultural heritage. Arab classical music, the *Tarab*, is still popular in Aleppo and Damascus, and artists like Sabri Mdallal, Sabah Fakhri, and Nour Mhanna are prominent figures in the region.

Members of organisations involved in documentation also sometimes perform ICH elements: members of the Al-Adeyat Society, for example, sing traditional songs.

Other bodies help to promote the continued practice of traditional crafts. The Yabroud Friends Society in the Rural Damascus Governorate has promoted traditional crafts by assisting craftsmen with access to markets. The Union of Handicrafts in Damascus has done the same by creating a professional heritage quarter and establishing a training organisation.

The Association of Revival of Popular Heritage in Damascus aims at reviving, safeguarding and documenting popular heritage in Syria, especially traditional sword and shield sports, songs and calligraphy.

ICH expressions often need specific objects, such as musical instruments, costumes, tools and utensils, which is why the UNESCO Convention included associated objects, instruments and artefacts in its definition of ICH. Various museums and other institutions, such as the Heritage and Customs House in Al-Raqqa, the Arabic Cultural Centre in the town of Ein Al-Baida, Jarablos Cultural Centre and the Al-Azem Palace in Damascus gather objects and artefacts. The collection at the Al-Azem Palace documents Syrian popular heritage relating to traditional clothes, jewellery, hospitality, daily life of people, and so on.

A.1.b Training Institutions

There are currently several specialised training institutions in the field of ICH in Syria; they are primarily research institutions.

The Arab Scientific Heritage Institute studies heritage and teaches scientific methods for doing so. A 'Scientific Symposium on the Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage: Content, Goals, Implementation Mechanisms' was held at the Arab Scientific Heritage Institute in Aleppo University from 1-3 October 2005.

Various other institutions have hosted conferences. A Symposium on 'Arts and Crafts: Cultural Diversity and Local Development', hosted by the Supreme Council for Promoting Arts, Literature and Social Sciences, was held in Damascus from 5-7 October 2008. The Ministry of Culture's Popular Heritage Directorate held a symposium entitled 'Documenting Popular Heritage- Paradoxes & Horizons' from 10-11 May 2009 in Al-Sweida.

The Aramaic Language Teaching Institute, Ma'loula, was established in 2007. It is affiliated to and financed by Damascus University. Teaching courses are offered over 2 month periods, 5 days a week. The Aramaic language is in need of safeguarding because very few people still speak that language (living in Ma'loula, Jabi'deen and Sarkha, 50 km North of Damascus.

The Technical Institute of Applied Arts teaches Arabic Calligraphy, including Thuluth and Naskh Scripts, Ta'aliq Script and Kufic Script.

The Arab Music Department of the Ministry of Culture teaches both practical and theoretical aspects of Arab music. The following practical subjects are taught:

1. Oud (a pear-shaped stringed instrument) and Buzuq (a long necked fretted lute);
2. Qanun (an instrument similar to a zither, but with a narrow trapezoid soundboard);
3. Ney (a reed flute with the mouthpiece at one end);
4. Arab Singing.

During their five years of study students learn to perform important traditional musical genres such as Muwashshah, Qasiida, Dor and Taktouka.

Other organisations run training courses, but they are not primarily regarded as training institutions. The Association of Revival of Popular Heritage in Damascus, for example, runs (fully accredited) courses for playing various traditional musical instruments. Ali Yusuf Khalaf has been teaching traditional singing at Dmair . Some documentation projects aim to develop capacity within communities for documenting and utilising their heritage resources. The Youth Cultural Bus project aims to empower youth in Palmyra and Al-Sweida to access and own their cultural heritage, providing them with oral history and photography training in the process. The Rawafed project will develop community capacities to undertake cultural mapping and culturally-informed socio-economic planning processes.

A.1.c Documentation Institutions

Official bodies will be discussed further in section A.2, but suffice to mention here that the Ministry of Culture has established Heritage Committees in each Governorate that are requested to document intangible heritage and related tangible heritage and products under a project called 'Collecting and Registering General Popular Heritage'. These Committees report to a central Review Committee under the MEDLIHER ICH programme. Cultural centres have been established under the regional Directorates of Culture in many towns, including Palmyra, Jarablos, and Manbej.

Most organisations involved in ICH-related activities in Syria do documentation of ICH, encouraged by the Ministry of Culture, which publishes books about Syrian heritage. Much of the documentation is done by local experts, who then submit their work to the Cultural Directorate working under the Ministry of Culture in their region. Groups in Damascus such as the Association of Revival of Popular Heritage and the Friends of Damascus Society, for example, have been involved in documentation of ICH in that Governorate. In the Governorate of Homs, the ICH Collection Association, in cooperation with the Antiquities Society, has been documenting the songs and types of Dabka of Salamia. Various organisations and individuals have been assisting in the documentation of ICH in Aleppo, facilitated by the Manbej Centre and the Jarablos Centre. The Yabroud Friends Society is documenting ICH in the Rural Damascus Governorate. In Daraa Governorate, a group of researchers, known as the Folklore Society in Houran, documents ICH. In other Governorates, individual researchers have conducted documentation studies. Some of these works are listed in the Bibliography attached to this report.

Bodies conducting ICH documentation activities as part of their academic research include the Al-Adeyat Society (The Archaeological Society) in Aleppo, the Arab Scientific Heritage Institute in Aleppo University, the Antiquities Society, which is active all over the country, the General Organisation for Remote Sensing (G.O.R.S) and the Tarim Centre for Architecture and Heritage.

The Antiquities Society has branches in most Governorates. Apart from conducting historical studies, it is also interested in reviving, preserving and safeguarding ICH.

The Tarim Centre for Architecture and Heritage in Damascus participates in the Memory of the Arab World project, aimed at documenting Arab cultural heritage from 22 countries and making it available online. The Tarim Centre helped to host a steering committee meeting for that project in 2008; a regional conference on 'Electronic Documentation of Arab Heritage' was held in Damascus at the same time.

The General Organisation for Remote Sensing (G.O.R.S) collected data on ICH as part of its Satellite Atlas of the Syrian Coast. Satellite imagery has been used with computer programs (GIS and GPS) to create general and detailed maps of the region with descriptive historical data on sites. The project is helping to invigorate cultural tourism.

The Syria Trust for Development (Rawafed project) also does documentation of ICH as part of a cultural mapping project in the Wadi Al-Nadara region. The Syria Trust for Development is a Syrian NGO chaired by H.E. Mrs. Asma Al-Assad. The Trust aims to empower Syrian individuals in all walks of life to play an active role in building and shaping their society. Rawafed, its cultural project, has

two key focus areas that involve elements of intangible cultural heritage: Investing in Culture for Community Development and Connecting People with Heritage.

Rawafed's project in community development is currently in its pilot phase in the Wadi Al-Nadara region of Syria. The project aims to encourage the use of different cultural assets in planning the socio-economic development of Syria. It has three main components: participatory research, community development and advocacy. The research component began in August 2009 and is due for completion in April 2010, with the production of a range of resources including a cultural map of the region, a working methodology of how the research was undertaken, and a plan as to how the theoretical knowledge gained can be used on a practical level within the local communities. Methodologies used include focus groups, surveys, semi-structured interviews, governmental information and specialised research, all with the emphasis on community involvement and capacity building. The second phase of this programme will begin in spring 2010, and will focus on community development.

Results of the research will be announced at a scientific conference in June 2010 on Culture and Development, a tool kit for cultural mapping will be developed based on the assessment of the case study in Wadi Al-Nadara. The cultural map will help guide the planning processes for socio-economic development in these areas.

A.2 Legal, technical, administrative and financial capacities and measures available

A.2.a Legal measures

There is currently no legislation regulating the safeguarding of the ICH in Syria.

The Law of Antiquities (no.222 of 1963), protects ancient movable or immovable properties (older than about 200 AD) and more recent properties considered by the General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums to have 'historical, artistic or national characteristics'. The General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums decides on the strategies to be adopted for conservation of heritage places and objects, and whether objects should be kept in museums or be allowed to remain with their original owner. Heritage places and objects may be associated with intangible heritage elements, and the manner and place of their conservation may thus be of significance to the safeguarding of intangible heritage in Syria. If musical instruments, for example, were to be removed from the care of the people using them, this could contribute to the demise of musical performances as an ICH element.

The Syrian Parliament will soon discuss a project for a Law on Intellectual Property, the seventh chapter of which deals with Popular Heritage (Folklore) Expressions (Articles 88 to 93). Article 88 identifies them as expressions older than 50 years, which may be:

1. Oral expressions;
2. Musical expressions;
3. Expressions in movements (dances, performances, and so on);
4. Tangible expressions;
5. Products of handicrafts;

6. Musical instruments;
7. Architectural forms.

Article 90 states that the Copyright Protection Directorate in the Ministry enjoys eternal non-assignable literary rights over popular heritage expressions and requires the Ministry to list them. Article 91 requires the origin of the expressions to be identified in this process, so as to protect them against misrepresentation. No commercial use may be made of popular heritage expressions unless the Ministry has given written permission. Customary enactment of popular heritage expressions and non-profit use is exempted from such restrictions.

A.2.b Administrative measures

The Ministry of Culture, led by Minister Dr. Riyad Naasan Agha, consists of a general administration and 22 departments. Within the Ministry of Culture, three main Directorates cover cultural heritage:

1. **Directorate of Revival and Promotion of Arab Heritage** – responsible for Arab manuscripts of historical, literary and scientific value and promoting Arabic;
2. **General Directorate of Antiquities and Museums** – responsible for World Heritage sites and other heritage places;
3. **Directorate of Popular Heritage**, responsible for popular heritage, which includes intangible heritage (as defined in the UNESCO Convention), as well as language, products of handicrafts (traditional popular industries) and vernacular architecture.

The Directorate of Popular Heritage consists of three divisions:

1. Study and Documented Research Division;
2. Technical Division;
3. Follow-up and Storehouse Division.

The Directorate of Popular Heritage has the following tasks:

1. Registering popular heritage, carrying out studies and field research;
2. Producing and dissemination scientific and tourist bulletins;
3. Organising heritage festivals and weeks, fashion shows and handicraft fairs;
4. Fostering interest in popular heritage, preserve it and establish popular heritage clubs;
5. Collecting documents, tools and materials relating to popular heritage.

The Popular Heritage Directorate cooperates with academics, researchers, local societies and heritage bearers and with private organisations.

Between 2007 and 2009 the Ministry created Popular Heritage Committees in all 14 Governorates, listed below. These Committees are affiliated to the local Cultural Directorates with the task of supervising, collecting, registering and documenting popular heritage. They are headed by the Governors; the Directors of Culture of the Governorates are Deputy Head. They work under the control of the Ministry of Culture and of the Ministry of Local Administration.

Governorate	Number of decision	Date
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Quneitra	1532	15/08/2007
Homs	1680	xx/09/2007
Rural Damascus	1909	16/10/2007
Latakia	1932	25/10/2007
Al-Hasaka	1949	25/10/2007
Hama	857	07/05/2008
Al-Raqqa	858	07/05/2008
Idlib	865	07/05/2008
Aleppo	859	07/05/2008
Daraa	1001	03/06/2008
Tartous	1533	10/09/2008
Deir ez-Zor	814	17/06/2009
Damascus	1651	18/11/2009
Al-Sweida	1800	15/12/2009

The Directorate of Popular Heritage of the Ministry of Culture recently sent a circular letter to the culture managers in all Governorates of Syria, containing a National Work Plan for Collecting, Registering and Documenting National Popular Cultural Heritage. The letter calls upon these managers to define elements of intangible and tangible popular heritage in various forms.

It was also suggested that the Governorates engage in activities such as

1. Providing references to publications concerning popular tangible and intangible heritage, with a view at setting up a popular cultural heritage library;
2. Interviewing elder tradition bearers; copies of all interviews to be sent to the Directorate of Popular Heritage;
3. Identifying and collecting traditional garments with the purpose of 'reviving and safeguarding them in their old forms but with a new outlook';
4. Recording and documenting samples of popular song, music and dances to be kept in the Directorate of Popular Heritage.

The letter further calls for:

1. Inscription of the Neo-Aramaic language as a world literature masterpiece;
2. Creation of a regional centre for ICH for the Arab World in Damascus;
3. Inventorying of handicrafts and traditional food practices;
4. Promotion of the Arabic language;
5. Cooperation among all state institutions interested in heritage.

Most of the work in the domain of popular heritage in the Governorates, however, is done on a voluntary basis. Most members of the Popular Heritage Committees may need specialised training to perform the tasks mentioned above.

A Special Review Committee was formed by the Ministry for the duration of the MEDLIHER Project; it is composed of three experts who are also members of one of the Heritage Committees:

Mahmoud Muflih Al-Baker;
 Mohammed Khaled Ramadan;
 Muneer Kayyal.

The Heritage Committees report to this Review Committee on the MEDLIHER project. The Review Committee held its first meeting in December 2009.

A Ministerial Heritage Committee was appointed on 10 January 2010 by the Minister of Culture to implement the results of the MEDLIHER Project, to prepare plans for implementing the UNESCO 2003 Convention, and to oversee the implementation of these plans. It is headed by Vice Minister of Culture Dr. Ali Al-Kayem and its members are:

Mr. Nazih Khoury, Director of Cultural Relations of the Ministry;
Dr. Bassam Jamus, General Director of Antiquities and Museums;
Miss Yara Moualla, Executive Aide, Projects and Initiatives, Office of the First Lady;
Dr. Sayel Salloum, Director of Popular Heritage;
Mr. Imad Aboufakher, Executive Aide, MEDLIHER Project;
Mr. Moutez Nabils, Director of Informatics.

A.3 Inventories of ICH present in the territory of Syria

There is a considerable amount of documentation underway about Syrian ICH (see Bibliography and discussion under A1).

As yet, there are no inventories of ICH elements present in the territory of Syria in the sense of the 2003 Convention. See chapter C below. A proposal by the Ministry of Culture for the creation of a Committee for a National Registry of Heritage is at present under consideration.

A.4 Involvement of Communities in safeguarding Syrian ICH

A number of projects actively involve the communities concerned in the safeguarding activities. This is according to the spirit of the Convention, as **Article 15** asks each State Party to endeavour to ensure that 'within the framework of its safeguarding activities of the intangible cultural heritage', they 'ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management'.

Most projects and various individual researchers interview older community members to collect information about Syrian ICH, including the Yabroud Friends Society, Jarablos Cultural Centre, the Satellite Atlas of the Syrian Coast Project, the Rawafed project and the Youth Cultural Bus in Palmyra and Al-Sweida.

Some projects involve community members in the performance of the ICH element, whether as performers or audience members. These may include the Al-Furat Folkloric Musical Group, the Umayyad Group, the Manbej Folk Arts Band and the Jarablos Heritage Revival Troupe. The Damascus Friends Society makes agreements with local communities a part of the process of promoting Damascene ICH in festivals.

Some projects involve community members in the research process, and in determining the outcomes of the project. The Yabroud Friends Society has for example tasked young people and children to look for aspects of intangible heritage in their community, in order to engage their

parents and families as well. Community members as well as expert researchers are members of the Society.

The Al-Makan Art Association is the Syrian implementing body for a project called Youth Cultural Bus, run in collaboration with COSV (Comitato di Coordinamento delle Organizzazioni per il Servizio Volontario), a development NGO based in Italy with a regional office in Lebanon. In this project they wish to empower youth in Palmyra and Al-Sweida to access and own their cultural heritage. They will do so by communicating with older generations and collecting their oral heritage. Photographic and interview materials will be turned into a mobile exhibition (in a bus), that will reach at least 800 people in the targeted regions, plus Damascus.

Community involvement in planning, research and capacity building is also a feature of Rawafed's project. The local community in Wadi Al-Nadara is playing an integral role in this programme to date, and the willingness and enthusiasm of the local people was one of the key reasons for choosing this area for the pilot project. Rawafed's role is purely as a facilitator of this process. The participatory research approach involved members of the local community in the process of gathering information, and training was provided to students in research techniques such as undertaking surveys. In addition local representatives were chosen in each participating village to work closely with the research team and facilitate and participate in the process. The projects adopted for the next phase will also be community-driven.

A.5 Promotion, awareness raising, education and other safeguarding measures

Many organisations and individuals promote and raise awareness of Syrian ICH through lectures, forums, meetings, publications (see Bibliography) and exhibitions. Many books are published by the Ministry of Culture. Huda Publishing House has also published many heritage-related books and its Director, Mr Majid Hashim Hammoud, is engaged in an ongoing book project entitled 'The Encyclopaedia of Folk Heritage in Syria'. The publishing house has also hosted local heritage forums in the city of Foua and Damascus. The Friends of Damascus Society, with more than 1300 members, has held folklore parties, book fairs (for books relating to Damascus), and hosted lectures on folklore.

Jarablos Cultural Centre in Aleppo offers lectures and has published a book about folk songs. Exhibitions and lectures about ICH in Aleppo have also been held at Manbej Centre and at the Al-Khafsa Station. The Al-Adeyat Society quarterly archaeological periodical publishes research papers on all aspects of intangible heritage. The Adeyat Society is digitising the comparative Encyclopaedia of Aleppo which is considered to be a great heritage treasure. It is about 5,000 pages long, and might be the richest of its kind in Syria. The Yabroud Friends Society holds regular community meetings and publishes a bulletin of its activities.

A number of organisations also organise performances and festivals to promote Syrian ICH. The Ministry of Culture has hosted the International Bosra Festival for Traditional Arts, among others. This festival, which has taken place annually for the last decade, hosts artists, singers, and dance groups from all over the world; the main focus of the Festival is the traditional arts.

In addition, every Governorate holds at least one arts festival a year, including traditional arts and handicrafts. Aleppo hosts many music festivals every year, the most popular one being the Syrian Song Festival, organised every two years in the citadel amphitheatre. Every year in May, Aleppo hosts the Traditional Handicraft Exhibition where all types of Syrian handicrafts are shown. Latakia is home to a major annual festival, the Al-Mahaba Festival. The festival includes cultural events, sports competitions and musical concerts. Other festivals include the Latakia in Memory Festival, which is aimed at reviving the ancient history of Latakia and includes carnivals, exhibitions on Ugarit and ancient Laodicea, and an ancient Phoenician boats contest. The latter two, of course, do not feature living or intangible heritage.

Recently the first Coastal Region Festival for Folk Arts was held in the Arabic Cultural Centre in Latakia. A number of young singers performed folk songs. Two other festivals are also staged annually in the rural areas of Latakia Governorate:

1. Eid Al-Qawzala: celebrated on January 13th every year, marks the New Year according to the Eastern Calendar. This occasion has been celebrated through the ages by setting small fires, especially on the area's hills and has become one of the most important events in the Coastal Region where many people are celebrating it the old way by sacrificing sheep and preparing traditional type of food, such as *kubaibat* with chard. This Eid is also an important religious and social occasion and is the time of social reconciliation and dispute resolution in an atmosphere of intimacy and love.
2. Eid Al-Zahouriah: celebrated on April 17th of each year, is a national, religious and social occasion since it coincides with Syria's Independence Day and with the April 4th Eid according to the Eastern Calendar. Several folk artists perform in this Eid, mostly from Latakia Governorate; highlights of the performances are shown on Syria Satellite Channel.

The Ministry of Tourism holds international and local fairs and encourages participation of traditional craftsmen in them. These include the Palmyra (Tadmur) Festival featuring traditional arts, handicrafts, and horse-riding. In addition, the Ministry of Tourism helps to develop and diversify traditional handicrafts markets e.g. setting national Quality Assurance standards for handicraft products, and marketing traditional crafts and industries.

The Friends of Damascus Society holds festivals reviving old customs and traditions, working with local communities on the Damascene Festivals Project.

The Association of Revival of Popular Heritage in Damascus has held a major traditional festival celebrating Damascus as the 2008 Arab Capital of Culture, and a literary and artistic festival celebrating Al-Quds (Jerusalem) as the 2009 Arab Capital of Culture. It has also been holding music and dance evenings (with poetry, spinning dervishes, etc.).

The Tarim Centre for Architecture and Heritage in Damascus has been hosting monthly cultural evenings in the Al-Assad library since 2008, which aim at spreading awareness of heritage and stimulating dialogue through exposure to expert speakers and exhibitions. They also publish a heritage magazine on architecture, traditions and traditional crafts, and participate in specialist fairs inside and outside Syria.

Television programmes have also been developed to promote Syrian ICH. 'Aghani alal-Bal' (songs ever remembered) records Ahazeej and Mawwal songs, and traces their origins, types and forms in all Governorates of Syria.

The outside world has also been paying attention to Syrian ICH and two of the MEDLIHER project partners have published CDs of Syrian traditional music and singing. UNESCO has honoured various musical traditions of Syria by including them in its trail-blazing Collection of Traditional Music of the World (1960 - 2004). Three titles in the series are fully dedicated to musical traditions from Syria:

1. *Syrian Orthodox Church - Tradition of Tur Abdin in Mesopotamia*, originally released in 1973 and reissued on CD in 1998;
2. *Zikr: Islamic Ritual - Rifa'iyya Brotherhood of Aleppo*, published in 1975 and reissued in 1989;
3. *Syrian Orthodox Church - Antioch Liturgy*, released in 1983 and republished in 1992 - this latter title presents liturgical songs in the Neo-Aramaic language.

Syrian sung poetry is also represented in a collection published by UNESCO as part of the same series, called *Sung Poetry - Middle East I*. The Paris-based Maison des Cultures du Monde, one of the other project partners in the MEDLIHER project, published four collections of traditional music from Syria in its Inédit series, which promotes endangered or little-known world musical heritage. The booklets accompanying each CD, in English and in French, have been written by specialists in their fields. Photographs and translations of the lyrics are included. The titles of these collections are:

1. *Wasla of Aleppo: Sabri Mudallal and his ensemble*;
2. *Muhammad Qadri Dallal: Unwonted Maqâmat*;
3. *Syrian Orthodox Church from Antioch: Choir members of churches St. George and St. Ephraim, Aleppo (Syria)*;
4. *Sufi Chanting from Syria: Dhikr Qâdirî Khâlwatî*.

A.6 International cooperation

Some local organisations have international affiliations. The Association of Revival of Popular Heritage is an Anna Lindh member through the Arab League. The Tarim Centre for Architecture and Heritage, which participates in the Memory of the Arab World Project research, has documented traditional arts and crafts in Yemen.

In 2009, twelve States jointly submitted a nomination file for inscription on the Representative List of the 2003 Convention concerning traditional falconry. The file was prepared at the instigation of the United Arab Emirates. Syrian experts participated in a number of meetings during which the file was finalised.

Austria, Morocco, Syria, and the United Kingdom have collaborated on a project to raise awareness about the hammam, the public bath, as a common tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Mediterranean area. This project was funded under the Euromed Heritage programme 4.

The hammam is embedded in urban communities, fulfilling an important role for neighbourhoods and, in many cases, for the Medina as a whole, and yet it runs the risk of disappearing. One of the specific hammams chosen for the project is the Hammam Ammuna in Damascus. Among the expected results of the project are social studies, rehabilitation designs on an ecological basis, introducing hammam and neighbourhood days in Mediterranean cities, and putting together an exhibition and a documentary film. The project will involve local communities (especially youth, students, and women) and stakeholder representatives (teachers and hammam staff) as well as the relevant scientific community and selected government agencies.¹

Conclusion

Although some informal community organisations and Governorates may not yet have sent in their information to the Syrian Ministry of Culture for this round of the MEDLIHER project, this process will be ongoing. From the information collected so far, we can demonstrate that there are quite a number of local and regional efforts, by individuals and organisations, aimed at safeguarding the ICH in Syrian territory.

According to **Article 2.3** of the 2003 Convention, ‘Safeguarding’ may mean a large variety of measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage (see section C.1.c below). Most safeguarding efforts in Syria are currently aimed at documentation, which is a worthy first step. We, as the Ministry of Culture, aim to coordinate documentation efforts through the Heritage Committees in each Governorate and the Review Committee of the MEDLIHER Project. Much of the work is devolved to Governorates who sometimes struggle to complete the task because of insufficient funding and training. The national Work Plan ‘For Collecting, Registering and Documenting National Popular Cultural Heritage’ has created a starting point for documentation and inventorying of the ICH in Syria.

The Convention focuses on safeguarding living heritage rather than that which people have already stopped practicing. Therefore, identification and documentation are not considered safeguarding activities in themselves; for that, they need to be linked to the promotion or the revitalisation of the practice and transmission of the ICH element by the communities concerned. And, in the same vein, documentation of ICH that is no longer practiced would not qualify as safeguarding in terms of the Convention. Fortunately, there are already several activities underway that aim at preserving or revitalising ICH elements with and within the communities concerned. In the framework of the implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage we will have to focus our attention on that type of action.

There is also considerable evidence of promotion, education and awareness-raising activities in Syria, through festivals, television programmes, publication of books, exhibitions and training programmes or lectures on ICH elements. Performances of traditional music, singing and dance could enhance the viability of the ICH elements concerned especially if they provide opportunities for community members themselves to continue to perform the ICH element. They could also assist in revitalisation of neglected ICH elements, and promote non-formal education and transmission of the required skills.

¹ See <http://www.euromedheritage.net/intern.cfm?menuID=12&submenuID=13&idproject=48>

Some projects, however, apparently endeavour to teach ICH that is no longer practiced in communities, or to revive living practices by teaching ICH elements to outsiders rather than within the communities who originally practiced them. Some festivals mirror the traditional performance of ICH elements by the communities concerned and thus perform a safeguarding function. Others promote traditional culture in general rather than specific ICH elements. They may thus perform an awareness-raising rather than a safeguarding function. Festivals that showcase only ICH elements that have ceased to be practiced in their communities do not contribute to the safeguarding of ICH.

Antiquities legislation may help with the 'protection of natural spaces and places of memory whose existence is necessary for expressing the intangible cultural heritage' (UNESCO Convention, **Article 14.c**). Museums may help to ensure that ICH elements remain viable by acting as storehouses for tools and instruments that may be required in the revitalisation of ICH elements that are still practiced, or by presenting present-day practices starting from objects and instruments associated to them. Popular heritage collections generally fall under the ambit of museums of antiquities, and thus find it hard to access appropriate expertise and link these collections to the communities concerned.

Experts and practitioners alike have stressed the importance of language (classical Arabic, local dialects and other languages) for the ICH in Syria and some of our Syrian safeguarding activities refer specifically to language. The Convention does not include language as a domain of the intangible heritage by itself. Inscribing the Aramaic language on a List of the Convention does not therefore seem feasible (and UNESCO no longer proclaims Masterpieces); promotion of the Arabic language and preservation of the Aramaic language would not fall under the definition of ICH safeguarding activities under the UNESCO Convention. However language is recognised by the Convention as a vehicle of the ICH and therefore any activities promoting the use of the appropriate languages or language register in the practice, transmission and promotion of ICH elements would be regarded as safeguarding activities. Thus, training in language proficiency provided by various institutions may be an important function associated with the continued viability of ICH in Syria.

Part B

Case study: the Dzīkr al-Qadiriya of Aleppo

Introduction

Syria does not yet have an inventory in the sense of the Intangible Heritage Convention of UNESCO, although it is preparing for drawing up a preliminary inventory soon. Consequently, no elements of Syrian ICH are yet inscribed on the lists of that Convention. As far as safeguarding activities are concerned, to date they have primarily concentrated on documentation and research - see chapter A and the Bibliography attached to this assessment. Apart from those mentioned in part C, few activities related to ICH can be presented as safeguarding activities as described by the UNESCO Convention and its Operational Directives. As a rule, these activities are not yet assessed and evaluated. This is why we decided to concentrate on the Dzīkr al-Qadiriya of Aleppo, a religious ceremony performed once a week in about ten different places in that town, involving singing and recitation, among other things. This ancient ceremony is world-renowned for the intense beauty of the chanting, supported by an informal massed choir.

Capacity building on a large scale will be required to train organisations, experts and practitioners as participants in the preparation and implementation of safeguarding activities that are in accordance with the spirit of the UNESCO Convention.

The discussion below follows points B.1 to B.7 of the outline for this assessment; they also draw from a questionnaire developed for the MEDLIHER project to identify Syrian ICH elements, with a view to their future insertion in an inventory of Syrian ICH. For the purpose of this exercise the questionnaire was filled in for the Dzīkr al-Qadiriya of Aleppo – see paragraph B.8 below.

Short description of the Dzīkr al-Qadiriya

Most Sufi orders (tariqats) perform the Dzīkr, a ceremony through which the murids (pupils) seek spiritual unity with God. The Dzīkr ceremonies of each order are very different, but usually involve incantations, singing and dancing.

The Dzīkr of followers of the al-Qadiriya order in Aleppo is performed once a week, usually on Friday, in about ten places in Aleppo, called zawiya (corners). In each of these zawiya the three main actors are:

1. A hereditary Sheikh who opens and oversees the ceremony,
2. The Leader of the Dzīkr who is the main singer, the Ra'is al-Dzīkr, who is assisted by 4 to 8 other singers,
3. The Leader of the Circle, Ra'is Al-Halaqa.

The singers are located in the middle of the zawiya. They are surrounded by other members of the order, who may number into the hundreds and who function as a background choir, chanting and

invoking God, while rhythmically moving the upper parts of their bodies. They are conducted by the Leader of the Circle. The attendants may enter into a state of spiritual ecstasy during the ritual.

During the Dzīkr al-Qadiriya the following musical genres are always sung in this order: Muwashshah, Qudud, Madhat, and more popular songs. The ceremony, depending on the authorisation of the Sheikh, may be accompanied by traditional musical instruments. Attenuated forms of the Dzīkr may be performed at weddings and social gatherings.

Women are not generally allowed to attend, but in some zawiyas they may listen from outside or in a special room. Some Dzīkr are specifically organised by and for women, but this does not take place within a zawiya.

There is some reduction in the diversity of songs performed in the Dzīkr today and the tradition is losing some of its popularity within Aleppo, though the ceremony retains its religious value and aesthetic appeal to many followers of the Qadiriya order.

B.1 The element's social and cultural functions

The murids (pupils) confirm their faith in God through the Dzīkr ceremony, through seeking unity with Him. For the murids, the Dzīkr is also a major marker of their identity as members of a specific Sufi order, and a key element in their social and cultural practices. Those who do not participate directly in a particular Dzīkr, but associate themselves with it, for example through attendance in the women's room, may also derive some sort of cultural identity from this association. People attending the Dzīkr as occasional visitors also enjoy its beauty.

The practice of the Dzīkr started many centuries ago and the variety of practice developed over the centuries shows that the Dzīkr has constantly changed over time; but today, people often have less time for the preparation and practice of the Dzīkr. In the various zawiyas of the Qadiriya order in Aleppo, the Dzīkr is practiced in different ways and subject to different rules.

The Dzīkr al-Qadiriya is open to members of other Sufi orders, other Muslims and total outsiders, as long as the rules on the segregation of genders in each zawiya are observed. For the community concerned and the main practitioners see Questionnaire sections 1.3, 2.1 and 2.6.

B.2 Assessment of the viability of the Dzīkr al-Qadiriya and current risks²

There is some reduction in the diversity of songs performed in the Dzīkr al-Qadiriya today, and it is performed nowadays by fewer people than it was ten or twenty years ago. Since the ceremony has retained its functions for those coming to the zawiyas, it may be assumed that the practice is not threatened with imminent disappearance.

Researchers and practitioners might have different opinions as to the viability of the Dzīkr al-Qadiriya today. Researchers have observed that the practice of the Dzīkr in Aleppo has been in gradual decline for a long time. They note that the number of zawiyas has been diminishing. Dancing

² The information presented under B.2 through B.7 largely originates from section 3 of the Questionnaire presented in paragraph B.8 below.

of the semma by the circle of the faithful (murids) disappeared from the ceremonies to resurface in secular celebrations and – especially – on stage. The diversity of the Qud-tunes and other melodies is also diminishing and the quality of the singing is decreasing. The remaining zawiyas still, however, attract considerable numbers of murids for whom, apparently, the Dzikh ceremonies have retained their function and value.

Nomination for either list of the Convention might be considered.

B.3 Efforts to safeguard the element and their impact

The communities involved continue to perform the Dzikh and organise themselves to that effect.

Recordings have and are being made of the Dzikh ceremonies as performed in various zawiyas and the musical traditions involved are being studied in Aleppo and elsewhere. This is a valuable activity as it will allow the preservation of the memory of the Dzikh ceremony in its diversity and depth for future generations.

A safeguarding plan in the sense of the UNESCO Convention has not yet been formulated. An initial proposal – among researchers - is that training courses for the singers might help ensure the viability of the practice of the Dzikh al-Qadiriya. No systematic consultation of the practitioners and their leaders has yet taken place on the desirability and possible character of safeguarding measures.

If recordings and documentation of the Dzikh al-Qadiriya lead only to stage performances – as has occurred in the case of the semma dances discussed above - then they will not contribute to the safeguarding of the ICH element in the sense of the UNESCO Convention, and may in fact threaten its status and continued practice within the communities concerned. Stage performances can be useful awareness-raising mechanisms but have different audiences and functions than the Dzikh does in its traditional form.

B.4 Efforts to promote the element

The Dzikh al-Qadiriya might be promoted or reinforced if ways could be found to keep young boys interested in accompanying their fathers and uncles to the zawiyas in large numbers. No studies have been undertaken to investigate how this might be achieved.

If the Dzikh al-Qadiriya of Aleppo were to be inscribed on one of Unesco's Intangible Heritage Lists, and no measures were put in place to ensure a balance between visitors and participants in future ceremonies, the presence of too many tourists and other outsiders may unwillingly disrupt the ceremony and thus diminish its religious meaning and value as a marker of identity for followers of the order. Measures would have to be developed to prevent this and other possible undesirable effects of inscription.

B.5 Participation of communities in safeguarding

The communities concerned and the main practitioners involved in the Dzikh al-Qadiriya are safeguarding the Dzikh by continuously enacting it and transmitting it to future generations of Murids. They are happy to oblige researchers who want to document and study their practices.

B.6 Competent bodies

Various local, national and foreign researchers and their organisations are interested in documenting the Dzikr al-Qadiriya. This may contribute to the documentation and – hopefully – to the safeguarding of the Dzikr of Aleppo in all its variety.

B.7 Organisation(s) of the community

In order to discuss the necessity and nature of future activities that might lead to reinforcement of the practice and diversity of the Dzikr al-Qadiriya in Aleppo, it will be necessary to involve the communities and groups concerned: the Sheiks and other individuals having special functions in the Dzikr performances, as well as representatives of the murids who attend the celebrations without fulfilling one of the leading roles. This is necessary - as is underscored repeatedly in the UNESCO Convention and its Operational Directives – because safeguarding activities can only be successful with the full participation of the practitioners concerned and/or their representatives. This is not just because it is their heritage that is at stake, but also because it is they who create, recreate and transmit this heritage and thus ensure its future viability.

B.8 Identification of the Dzikh al-Qadiriya of Aleppo

Identification of the Dzikh al-Qadiriya of Aleppo
1.1. Name as used by the community concerned
The Dzikh al-Qadiriya of Aleppo / Dhikh al-Qadiriya fi Halab
1.2. Short definition
<p>The Dzikh al-Qadiriya of Aleppo is a religious ceremony performed once a week in about ten different places in the town, called zawiya. The ceremonies, attended by followers of the Qadiriya Sufi tariqat (order), involve singing, recitation and chanting, and rhythmical movements of the upper body. Central to the ceremony are the Sheikh, and a number of singers, conducted by the Ra'is al-Dzikh. They are surrounded by a circle of murids (pupils) or followers of the order, who function as a background choir, conducted by the Leader of the Circle, Ra'is al-Halaqa. The Dzikh performs multiple functions, the main one being that murids (pupils) confirm their faith in God through the Dzikh ceremony, through seeking spiritual relationship with Him.</p>
1.3. Community(ies) concerned
<p>The Dzikh al-Qadiriya of Aleppo primarily involves male followers of the Qadiriya tariqat living in Aleppo. This group cuts across all social classes. Other Muslims and outsiders are welcome to witness, but are not supposed to actively participate, in the ritual. The Qadiriya tariqat is one of the largest Sufi orders; its followers are found in many countries in the Arab world, and also elsewhere in the world of Islam. One person may belong to more than one Sufi order, or – within the same order – to more than one zawiya.</p>
1.4. Physical location(s)/distribution and frequency of enactment of the ICH element
<p>The Dzikh is usually performed in a mosque, sometimes in a private house; in every case, the place of performance is called a zawiya (corner). There are still about ten zawiya in Aleppo in which the Dzikh is performed by followers of the Qadiriya order. In most zawiya, the Dzikh is performed on Friday afternoons, between the two prayers, which means that the ceremony will last longer in summer (up to 3 hours) and shorter (less than two hours) in winter.</p> <p>Attenuated and abridged forms of the Dzikh al-Qadiriya, at the occasions of weddings or other worldly celebrations, are performed outside the zawiya. The Sheikh and Ra'is al Dzikh and Ra'is al Halaqa definitely would not attend such events, their functions being fulfilled by a Munshid (chanter).</p> <p>Dzikh are performed by various Sufi orders in the whole Arab region, and by Sufi emigrants outside it; the form and content of these Dzikh may be quite different.</p>

1.5 Short overall description of the element

Most Sufi orders (tariqats) perform the Dzīkr, a ceremony through which the murids (pupils) seek spiritual unity with God. The Dzīkr ceremonies of each order are very different, but usually involve incantations, singing and dancing. In the Dzīkrs al-Qadiriya of Aleppo the attendants do not dance.

The Dzīkr al-Qadiriya of Aleppo is performed once a week, usually on Friday, in about ten places in Aleppo, called zawiya (corners). In each of these zawiya the three main actors are: (i) a hereditary Sheikh who opens and oversees the ceremony, (ii) the lead singer, the Ra'is al-Dzīkr, who is assisted by 4 to 8 other singers, (iii) the Leader of the Circle, Ra'is Al-Halaqa. The singers are located in the middle of the zawiya. They are surrounded by other members of the order, who may number into the hundreds and who function as a background choir, chanting and invoking God, while rhythmically moving the upper part of their body. They are conducted by the Leader of the Circle. The attendants often enter into a state of spiritual ecstasy during the ritual.

During the Dzīkr al-Qadiriya the following musical genres are performed: Muwashshah, Qudud, Madhat, and more popular songs (always in this order). The ceremony, depending on the authorisation of the Sheikh, may be accompanied by a small drum, cymbals or other instruments. Attenuated forms of the Dzīkr may be performed at weddings and social gatherings; the three main figures are then not present and not all genres are performed.

Women are not allowed to attend, but in some zawiya they may listen from outside or in a special room.

There is some reduction in the diversity of songs performed in the Dzīkr today and the tradition is losing some of its popularity within Aleppo, though the ceremony retains its religious value and aesthetic appeal to many followers of the Qadiriya order. The Dzīkr remains a major marker of identity for followers of the Qadiriya order, and a key element in their social and cultural practices.

2. Characteristics of the ICH element

2.1. Persons directly involved in the Dzīkr

Each zawiya has its Sheikh, a lead singer called the Leader of the Dzīkr (Ra'is al-Dzīkr) and a Leader of the Circle (Ra'is al-Halaqa). The Sheikh is the guardian of the tradition; he opens the ceremony by reciting al-Awrad and ensures it is conducted according to the appropriate rules. The function is hereditary; after his death he is succeeded by his eldest male descendant, even if they are very young.

The Ra'is al-Dzīkr is the main performer; he is assisted by 6 to 8 singers forming two wings on his left and right. They stand together in the middle of the zawiya.

The others attending, who may number in the tens or hundreds, form a circle around the singers;

they are the background choir, led by the Ra'is al-Halaqa. All participants except the Sheikh are standing. The Sheikh and the Leader of the Circle are positioned opposite to each other, on the circle.

Being a Sheikh or Ra'is is not a full-time occupation; some Sheiks are also imams, others have more worldly professions. The functions of the Ra'is al-Dzikr and of the Ra'is al-Halaqa are also transferred between male relatives within specific families; they are succeeded, when they can no longer perform their function, by suitable members of their family.

Only men participate in Dzikr ceremonies in the zawiyas.

2.2. Other people in the community who are less directly involved, but who contribute to the practice of the ICH element or facilitate its practice

The zawiyas are prepared for the ceremony by some of the murids (pupils of the Sheikh).

2.3. Language(s) or language register(s) involved

Both standard and dialectal Arabic are used; the latter predominates.

2.4. Associated tangible elements

The zawiya (literally 'corner') is the main associated tangible element; most zawiyas are in mosques. Zawiyas located outside mosques are not used for other purposes between Dzikr ceremonies. Special banners or flags are found in the zawiyas.

The Dzikr is mainly enacted using the human voice and body. Drums (tabl), tambourines (daf and mazhar) and cymbals (sonouj) may be used to highlight specific episodes and transitions. When attenuated forms of Dzikr are performed at weddings or home celebrations instruments are always used. Some Sheikhs are opposed to the use of musical instruments.

No special clothes are required; family members of the Sheikh may wear headgear indicating their degree of closeness to him.

2.5. Other intangible elements associated with the enactment or transmission of the ICH element

During the ceremony, various types of collective singing are practiced, such as Muwashshah, Qudud, Madhat and popular songs – always in that order. They are also practiced outside the Dzikr ceremonies.

2.6. Customary practices governing access to the ICH element or to aspects of it

The Sheikh sees to it that the correct procedures are followed for each zawiya, but these procedures differ between zawiyas. Male members of other zawiyas or other Sufi orders are welcome to participate. Outsiders are also allowed to attend; the Sheikh may request them not to participate actively in the ceremony.

Women do not attend the Dzikr al-Qadiriya; there is one exception: if the Sheikh is succeeded by a young boy, his mother will sit next to him in the zawiya.

At the al-Hilaliya zawiya women may listen from outside. In the al-Bathenjki zawiya there is a separate room from where women can listen and it also happens – though not often - that women organise their own Dzikh. Women organising their own Dzikh do so at home, not in a zawiya. Those hosting the ceremony fulfil the roles of Sheikh and Ra'is al-Dzikh (main singer). There is no Ra'is al-Halaqa.

Audio-visual recording is not allowed, but audio recording is usually permitted. In the al-Haliliyah zawiya neither is allowed.

2.7. Modes of transmission to others in the community, including younger generations

From a young age, boys accompany their father to the zawiya to attend the Dzikh and gradually learn the melodies, the words and the movements required to assist actively in the Dzikh. In the past al-Ra'is would regularly practice the singing with his assistants; nowadays this is reduced to incidental informal instruction. The singers receive some financial remuneration.

2.8. Relevant organisations (community organisations, NGOs, others)

The people who associate with a specific al-Qadiriya zawiya in Aleppo form an informal socio-religious network headed by a hereditary Sheikh.

The Sabah Fakhri Institute in Aleppo studies the various religious ceremonies and traditional music and dance performances taking place in Aleppo.

3. State of the ICH element: viability

3.1. Threats to the continued enactment of the element

Researchers have observed that the practice of the Dzikh in Aleppo has been in gradual decline for a long time. The number of zawiya has been diminishing, dancing of the semma by the murids disappeared from the ceremonies to resurface in secular celebrations and – especially – on stage; the diversity of the Qud-tunes and other melodies is diminishing and the quality of the singers is decreasing. The remaining zawiya still, however, attract considerable numbers of murids for whom, apparently, the Dzikh ceremonies have retained their function and value.

If the Dzikh al-Qadiriya of Aleppo were to be inscribed on one of Unesco's Intangible Heritage Lists, and no measures were put in place to ensure a balance between visitors and participants in future ceremonies, the presence of too many tourists and other outsiders may unwillingly disrupt the ceremony and thus diminish its religious meaning and value as a marker of identity for followers of the order. Measures would have to be developed to prevent this and other possible undesirable effects of inscription.

3.2. Threats to the transmission of the element

Young people nowadays are less interested in attending the Dzikr and their numbers are on the decline.

3.3. Threats to the sustainability of access to tangible elements and resources associated with the ICH element

There are no such threats. The zawiyas are available and the availability of the few musical instruments required does not pose a problem either.

3.4. Viability of other intangible heritage elements associated with the ICH element

n/a

3.5. Safeguarding or other measures in place to address any of these threats and encourage future enactment and transmission of the ICH element

The Dzikr al-Qadiriya is obviously losing some of its diversity, and it is performed nowadays by fewer people than it was ten or twenty years ago. Since the ceremony has retained its functions for those coming to the zawiyas, it may be assumed that the practice is not threatened with imminent disappearance. Researchers and practitioners might have different opinions as to the state of viability of the Dzikr al-Qadiriya.

Recordings have and are being made of the Dzikr ceremonies as performed in various zawiyas and the musical traditions involved are being studied in Aleppo and elsewhere. This will allow the preservation of the memory of the Dzikr ceremony in its diversity and depth for future generations.

A safeguarding plan has not yet been formulated. A first idea is that training courses for the singers might help ensure the viability of the practice of the Dzikr al-Qadiriya. No systematic consultation of the practitioners and their leaders has yet taken place on the desirability and possible character of safeguarding measures.

If recordings and documentation of the Dzikr al-Qadiriya lead only to stage performances – as has occurred in the case of the semma dances discussed above - then they will not contribute to the safeguarding of the ICH element in the sense of the UNESCO Convention, and may in fact threaten its status and continued practice within the communities concerned. Stage performances can be useful awareness-raising mechanisms but have different audiences and functions than the Dzikr does in its traditional form.

4. Data restrictions and permissions

4.1. Consent from and involvement of the community/ies concerned in data gathering

The data were gathered from Dr. Muhammad Qadri Dalal, researcher and singer, director of the Song and Music Institute in Aleppo and former director of the Sabah Fakhri Institute, equally in Aleppo; Dr. Dalal has documented the Dzikrs of Aleppo for many years and the murids were eager to assist him where they could.

4.2. Restrictions, if any, on the use of or access to collected data

Study and appropriate use of recordings of the ceremonies poses no problems; the dissemination in public of audiovisual material produced in some of the zawiyas may be a sensitive issue.

4.3 Resource person

The data were provided by Dr. M. Q. Dallal (see above).

4.4. Date and place of data gathering

21 March 2010, in Damascus.

5. References concerning the ICH element

5.1. Literature

Muhammad Qadri Dalal, Religious Kudud,

Muhammad Qadri Dalal, Sabri Mudallal, the Sheikh of Singers See also annex 3, bibliography

5.2. Audiovisual materials, recordings etc. in archives, museums and private collections

Dr. Dalal has made extensive recordings of the Dzikr and of all other types of traditional ceremonies and presentations involving music and dance. Much of this recording was done under the auspices of the Festival: Aleppo – Capital of Arab Culture.

5.3. Documentary material and objects in archives, museums and private collections

These materials are in his personal archive. The local research institutions have their own collections.

6. Inventorying data
6.1. Person(s) who compiled the inventory entry
n/a
6.2. Proof of consent of the community/ies concerned for (a) inventorying the element and (b) for the information to be provided in the inventory
n/a
6.3. Date of entering the data into the inventory
n/a

Part C

Challenges, solutions and priority activities

C.1 Challenges

C.1.a Obligations under the 2003 UNESCO Convention

The situation in Syria is no exception to the worldwide tendency for intangible cultural heritage to be increasingly threatened. In our country, too, the introduction of mass media (especially television) and new communication technologies, the mechanisation of traditional manual work, urbanisation and increased population mobility, and tourism have brought many benefits, but they have also contributed to the erosion of local and national ICH expressions and practices. The introduction of general education and other forms of social transformation also disrupt traditional ways of transmitting skills and knowledge that underlie traditional expressions and practices.

Syrian experts and community members alike report a reduction in the diversity of local forms and genres of traditional music and dance and story-telling, for instance. They also report a dramatic decrease in the use of traditional handicraft products and, hence, in their production. In Syria, however, relatively few elements of ICH have totally disappeared and it seems possible to revitalise many endangered practices, expressions and handicrafts, as there are still elderly performers or masters who are eager to transmit their knowledge. A major challenge remains: how to build awareness of the existence and importance of the ICH in the minds of young people and how to help them continue the traditions and practices of their parents and grandparents, if necessary in new ways, adapted to the circumstances of modern life.

Once alerted to it, the international community joined forces, within the framework of UNESCO, to face this situation. The most tangible result of their efforts was the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was adopted in 2003. Syria was one of many states that contributed, in 2002 and 2003, to the elaboration of this Convention. The Arab States were quick to ratify and Syria was the second among them to do so, in March 2005.

The Convention contains only a few articles of a binding nature. By ratifying it, Syria has undertaken to endeavour to implement the Convention; thus the articles that impose obligations (**Articles 11, 12 and 29** of the Convention) will receive special attention in this chapter.

Article 11.a states that each State Party *shall* take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the ICH present in its territory.

Safeguarding is defined as implementing measures aimed at ensuring the viability of this heritage, i.e. ensuring or reinforcing the conditions under which present-day generations may continue to enact and develop their ICH and under which, at the same time, they may continue transmitting it to younger generations. The Convention mentions a large number of possible safeguarding measures, from identification to revitalisation (see section C.1.c below). Any of these measures, however, only deserve to be called safeguarding measures if they are intended to foster the conditions under

which people may continue to enact, develop and transmit their ICH (see **Article 2.3** of the Convention).

Articles 11.b and 12 of the Convention introduce another firm obligation for States Parties to the Convention: the identification of the ICH present in their territory through the preparation of one or more inventories. Inventories are presented by the Convention as a preliminary safeguarding measure. Taking the position that any ICH element belongs to the community in which it has traditionally been enacted, the Convention requests States Parties to inventory and safeguard the ICH in their territory with the full participation of relevant communities.

The annexes attached to this report shows that community members in Syria are keen participants in many activities concerning our ICH. At the moment some pilot projects are underway that introduce new approaches to community involvement, such as the Youth Cultural Bus and the Rawafed project of the Syria Trust.

Article 32 of the Convention states that States Parties to the Convention have to report once every six years about the implementation of the Convention at the national level, starting six years after ratification. Syria will have to deliver its first report in December 2011.

The Convention also contains a large number of recommendations for the organisation of the safeguarding of ICH at the national level. These include the adoption of a general policy for safeguarding ICH, the designation or establishment of one or more institutions – including documentation institutions - that may guide safeguarding activities, the adoption of the necessary legal, administrative and financial measures and the encouragement of research activities (see **Article 13**). **Article 14**, among other things, encourages States Parties to develop educational and awareness-raising programmes, training programmes for tradition bearers and capacity-building programmes for safeguarding.

A plan should soon be developed to strengthen the institutional and legal framework within which the safeguarding of the Syrian ICH can be undertaken, providing clear mandates for all parties involved. Capacity building on a large scale is a precondition for the successful implementation of the Convention and its Operational Directives in Syria.

C.1.b Preparing one or more inventories of the ICH present in Syria

Syria took measures to safeguard our ICH even before we ratified the Convention. Our Ministry of Culture has long since had a special Directorate for Popular Heritage, which deals with intangible expressions and practices, including the instruments and objects that are associated with them and the products of traditional handicrafts and vernacular architecture. In all Governorates of our country, Popular Heritage Committees oversee activities related to ICH and in all of them many such activities are carried out, by governmental and non-governmental organisations, by individual experts and, importantly, also within the communities themselves. Such activities were summarised and analysed in part A of this assessment, within the limits of the information available.

Many of these activities involve research and documentation, both by institutions and individual experts. As we noted in section A.3 of this report, however, Syria does not yet have one or more inventories in the sense of the UNESCO Convention. The national Work Plan “For Collecting,

Registering and Documenting National Popular Cultural Heritage” may become a starting point for the development of a targeted project to inventory the ICH in our territory.

Although the States Parties to the UNESCO Convention are entitled to draw up their inventories in a manner geared to their own circumstances, the Convention implicitly and explicitly requires States Parties to consider a number of issues.

First, the Convention excludes elements that are no longer performed or practiced from its definition of ICH. Thus, while ‘extinct’ ICH elements are included in certain national inventories as a separate category, they may not be nominated to the international lists under the Convention. Similarly, the Convention excludes from its definition of ICH elements that are not compatible with the requirements of human rights and sustainable development.

Second, the Convention requires national inventories to be able to contribute to the safeguarding of the ICH elements listed. Thus, inventories should provide information on the viability (and threats to the viability) of inventoried elements.

Third, the inventories should, ultimately, cover as many elements of the ICH present in the territory of Syria as possible. Inventories are designed to present an overall view of the heritage of the national community and of its various constituent local communities. In the spirit of the Convention, national inventories should provide a sense of the richness and diversity of ICH in a country; they are not intended to highlight a small selection of cultural ‘masterpieces’.

Fourth, the Convention requires States Parties to identify ICH elements, but not to document them in any great depth for the purposes of inventorying. This means that the process of inventorying need not focus too extensively on research – otherwise, updating the inventories, which is an obligation imposed by the Convention, would be a very time-consuming process.

Finally, the inventories are to be prepared with the fullest possible cooperation of the groups of tradition bearers concerned. This process of community participation is extremely important to ensure that inventorying contributes to safeguarding, and should be documented in the inventory.

Below we propose that Syria soon create a first, preliminary inventory and that it start developing at the same time the inventorying system that will later be used to inventory a much more comprehensive range of the ICH present in the territory of Syria.

Training of people who will be involved in the collection and processing of information that are to be inventoried is urgently required. This need was identified in the first meeting of the Ministerial Review Committee after it had studied reports received from the Cultural Heritage Committees of the Governorates. Financial remuneration of the people who will be involved in the preparation of inventory entries was another recommendation of the Review Committee.

C.1.c Safeguarding the ICH

The UNESCO Convention mentions a large number of possible safeguarding measures including identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission (through formal and non-formal education) and revitalisation. Each of these measures,

however, only deserves to be called a safeguarding measure if it is intended to foster the conditions under which people may continue to enact, develop and transmit their ICH.

In section A.1 of this report we summarised ICH-related activities in Syria, most of which may be characterised as safeguarding measures in the sense of the UNESCO Convention. Examples are:

1. **Performances of traditional music, singing and dance** by folk bands like the Sahal Houran Band in Daraa, the Al-Furat Folkloric Musical Group and the Jarablos Heritage Revival Troupe;
2. **The promotion of traditional crafts** in Yabroud and Damascus, which has assisted craftsmen with access to markets;
3. Reduction of taxes for traditional craftspeople;
4. **The involvement of local communities** in the cultural mapping of the Wadi Al-Nadara region (through the Rawafed project);
5. **Numerous, largely voluntary, documentation initiatives** by individuals and groups in various Governorates, that may inform the first inventorying process.
6. **The national work plan for Collecting, Registering and Documenting National Popular Cultural Heritage** initiated by the Department of Popular Heritage of the Ministry of Culture in every Governorate.
7. **Promotion and awareness-raising** about the value of Syrian ICH through numerous festivals, such as the Bosra Festival for Traditional Arts in Damascus, the Syrian Song Festival in Aleppo, and the Coastal Region Festival for Folk Arts.

The Intangible Heritage Convention and its Operational Directives assume that all States Parties will assist or encourage communities and organisations to develop and execute safeguarding plans for specific ICH elements that are more or less endangered – and that are presented as such in an inventory. Setting up a safeguarding plan for an element requires an analysis of the threats to the viability and a plan of action on how to counteract and safeguard the element within and with the community in question. Safeguarding plans will have to be developed for all elements that Syria will propose for inscription on the lists of the UNESCO Convention.

Requests for financial assistance may be submitted to the Intergovernmental Committee that oversees the implementation of the Convention for safeguarding activities that are in line with the Convention. Such requests must include detailed safeguarding plans and detailed budget estimates.

Activities concerning ICH practices and expressions that do not meet the definition of safeguarding developed by the Convention may be quite useful for other purposes than safeguarding. They can, however, not be funded or encouraged within the national or international framework of the implementation of the UNESCO Convention. Nor will it be possible to request international assistance for them from the fund of the Convention.

C.1.d Participating in the implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the international level

States Parties to the Convention may nominate elements of their ICH for inscription on the two new UNESCO lists that are established by the Convention: the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (also known as the Representative List) and the List of Intangible

Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding (also known as the Urgent Safeguarding List). Syria would like to start submitting elements for inscription for both lists within the duration of the MEDLIHER project.

Under the auspices of the Convention it will be possible to profit from experiences elsewhere in the world and from support by UNESCO. It will be possible, once an endangered element has been inscribed on the Urgent Safeguarding List, to submit requests for financial assistance for the implementation of plans aimed at its safeguarding. The Operational Directives of the UNESCO Convention specify that its Fund will to a large extent be used for elements inscribed on the Urgent Safeguarding List. States Parties to the Convention may also submit requests for financial assistance for other purposes, for instance for developing inventories, or for capacity-building activities.

The Convention also intends to offer a framework in which states that share one or more elements of their ICH may cooperate for the identification and safeguarding of such elements.

C.2 Activities and measures required to implement the Convention

The Syrian Government wishes that the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural heritage be appropriately implemented in Syria itself and also that Syria become a significant player in the implementation of the Convention at the international level. To achieve this, it is necessary that the preparation of one or more inventories be started without delay, that Syria soon start preparing nominations for the lists of the Convention, that requests for financial assistance be prepared for inventorying and/or for other safeguarding activities and that a campaign be designed for raising awareness about the ICH of Syria in all its diversity, and about the importance of that heritage and its safeguarding. We are happy to understand that the start for some of such activities may be given under the MEDLIHER project.

To achieve these objectives, all of the measures suggested in the Explanatory Note for section C.2.a of the MEDLIHER project outline are appropriate. These measures will be discussed in relation to the circumstances in Syria in section C.2.a.1. In section C.2.a.2 we will indicate – as requested – which three measures we consider to be of the highest priority, and which additional three measures we consider to be of high priority.

C.2.a.1 Suggested measures considered within the Syrian context

(i) Develop legal, technical, administrative and financial measures

As yet, there is no legislation regulating specifically the safeguarding of the ICH; the Law referred to in section A.1 above will concentrate on intellectual property rights.

As far as administrative measures are concerned, the Ministry of Culture, which has itself a Directorate for Popular Heritage, as set forth in section A.2.b, already has taken a number of far-reaching measures. It, for instance, created:

1. Popular Heritage Committees in the Governorates;
2. The MEDLIHER Review Committee;
3. The Ministerial Intangible Heritage Committee (in full: the *Ministerial Heritage Committee on Implementing UNESCO's 2003 Convention*), which is tasked to supervise

the implementation of the UNESCO Convention and the execution of the MEDLIHER Project in Syria.

At present the creation of one or more body is under procedures . This is a Committee for National Registry of Heritage and would be given the task of supervising the inventorying of the popular heritage of Syria (i.e. ICH plus handicraft products and vernacular architecture). The members of such a Committee should, while being experts in the various fields of popular heritage, represent governmental and non-governmental organisations, academia and communities who practice the ICH. The creation of such a consultative body would be in line with the recommendation made in **Paragraph 77** of the Operational Directives of the Intangible Heritage Convention.

It is important that the tasks and mandates of these different bodies be well defined. The Committee for National Registry, might also be given advisory functions. It might for instance advise the Ministry on the outlines of a system for inventorying the ICH present in Syria, validating information concerning ICH elements before they will be entered in an inventory, and on drafting a general plan for the actual safeguarding of the ICH present in Syria. Based on the advice of the Committee for National Registry , the Ministerial Intangible Heritage Committee may then compile draft policy outlines aimed at the implementation of UNESCO's Intangible Heritage Convention in Syria. These may then be executed under the supervision of our Ministry's Popular Heritage Directorate. On its part, the Ministerial Intangible Heritage Committee would have to advise on the desirability and manner of developing special legal measures to reinforce the safeguarding of Syrian ICH.

Many organisations and individuals, including the Popular Heritage Committees in the Governorates and museums, have made it clear that lack of funding is a major problem at present. Assistance through the MEDLIHER project (which is temporary) and the Fund of the Convention (for which many States Parties will be competing) should be considered supplementary to Syria's own longer-term investments in the safeguarding of our Intangible Heritage. Once the Ministerial Heritage Committee produces a blueprint for the implementation of the Convention in Syria, a more focused discussion on the financing of the proposed measures can take place.

At the moment the terms used to describe ICH and safeguarding activities, and the categories used, are not consistent across all official texts dealing with Syrian ICH. They are also not always in line with those used in the UNESCO Convention and its Directives. One of the first tasks of a consultative / advisory body might be to formulate a proposal on the use of terminology and categories by those dealing within Syria with the safeguarding of ICH. The general use of more streamlined terminology, also by our Ministry, will facilitate communication at the national level and cooperation at the international level.

(ii) Establish Documentation Institutions and ensure access to them

As indicated in part A above, there are many individual experts, organisations and institutions in Syria that have been collecting and recording – often for decades - impressive amounts of traditions and practices belonging to all domains of ICH. Many scholars and other interested individuals have also prepared materials for publication, much of which could not yet be published.

It is indispensable, for the identification, promotion and safeguarding of the ICH present in Syria, to have a central institution that will collect and make accessible all information available on Syrian ICH.

That would include published and unpublished documentation, recordings, studies, interviews and fieldwork notes. Such a *Documentation Centre for ICH in Syria* would also have to maintain and keep up-to-date an ongoing bibliography of work-in-progress and lists of community-based, non-governmental and academic organisations. It would also collect information on past and ongoing safeguarding activities, and it would thus be in a position to coordinate capacity-building activities and ensure the distribution of resources for capacity building across the country. It might also, guided by a consultative / advisory body as discussed in the previous paragraph, develop and execute a policy for the publication of books and other materials documenting and studying Syrian ICH.

In this context it should be recalled that the Convention includes documentation among the safeguarding measures (if it contributes or may contribute to ensure the viability of ICH) and that **Paragraph 80** of the Operational Directives of the Convention calls upon the States Parties to engage in activities as described here. **Paragraph 82** of the Operational Directives indicates that the communities of tradition bearers should have access to material concerning their ICH and that sensitive information can only be disseminated in accordance with possible restrictions imposed by customary law of the communities concerned.

(iii) Draw up inventories

Syria may decide to tackle the issue of inventory making from two sides simultaneously. On the one hand, we might start quite practically by:

1. Providing training in data collection and processing;
2. Collecting information on a limited number of Syrian ICH elements;
3. Including, on an ongoing basis, the data collected in what might be called a preliminary inventory of Syrian ICH.

An advisory or consultative body, as discussed above, would have to supervise the data collection and to validate them before their insertion into a preliminary inventory.

At the same time, the Ministerial Committee could steer the preparation of a sustainable and more comprehensive inventorying system. In order to achieve that, many issues would have to be considered. Drawing up an inventorying system that is ultimately to cover all of the ICH present in a country as diverse as Syria, will be a time-consuming enterprise. Section 2.3 of the Guide presented in Annex 4 details examples of questions to be discussed in the process.

By creating a preliminary inventory, and by inserting 4 to 8 elements per year into it over the next few years, Syria would build up expertise that might come in handy for the discussion on the outline of a comprehensive inventory or inventories. Having elements inscribed on a preliminary inventory would also make it possible to start soon proposing elements for inscription on the Lists of the Convention. Such inscriptions would be publicised world-wide by UNESCO, which might have a positive effect in terms of awareness-raising about Syrian ICH, both within and outside the country. Once a dedicated body has decided how the more comprehensive Syrian inventory or inventories will be arranged and managed, it will be easy to assign a definite place in that framework for the elements already inventoried on a preliminary basis.

For the time being, the Questionnaire in Annex 4 to this assessment might be used to generate data for the preliminary inventory.

(iv) Develop capacity-building and awareness raising activities

Within the Syrian context all parties agree that capacity building for inventorying and for different types of safeguarding measures should have the highest priority. This applies to all groups of people that may be involved in safeguarding the ICH in the Syrian context: for civil servants in the ministry and in the heritage directorates in the Governorates, for the people active in the Popular Heritage Committees, for community representatives, for researchers, and for NGOs. It is also important to provide journalists specialised in culture and heritage with appropriate capacity-building opportunities.

UNESCO is developing a master plan for the preparation of curriculum material and for organising training sessions in a large number of countries. These materials will probably be available by late 2010. The Guide that is attached to this assessment as Annex 4 may be useful in the meantime, to inform those who will be involved in inventorying within Syria and in preparing nominations and requests for the attention of the Intangible Heritage Committee of the 2003 Convention.

The capacity-building exercise will have to be multi-layered, with different materials for different groups. Such a capacity-building campaign should be matched by awareness-raising campaigns that inform the public at large about the existence and importance of ICH. This may help to stimulate a positive public attitude towards their own heritage and towards the ICH of all communities that make up the Syrian nation. Awareness-raising campaigns should, among other things, aim at mobilising community members and individual tradition bearers to be involved in activities that concern their own ICH and to raise interest among young people to involve themselves in the practice of expressions and traditions that have been for generations characteristic of the community they belong to.

The creation of a platform or a network for organisations involved in safeguarding ICH, where they may share experiences and expertise, can accelerate awareness raising and foster the development of safeguarding activities. The Documentation Centre, proposed in section (ii) above might maintain and guide such a network.

It will be important to stress time and again in awareness-raising campaigns and in capacity-building workshops that, in the spirit of the Intangible Heritage Convention, ICH should be safeguarded as living and evolving practices and expressions within the communities in which they have originated. Festivals, fairs, dedicated marketplaces for traditional crafts and, some cases, heritage villages, may be important for awareness raising. The Convention assigns its highest priority, however, to safeguarding actions within, with and for the communities concerned. Community-oriented festivals that involve local communities and celebrate living heritage would therefore be particularly worthy of encouragement.

(v) Develop activities aimed at transmitting ICH

In order for ICH to be viable, it may be necessary to encourage new ways of transmission, or to revitalise, for instance through financial incentives, traditional systems of transmission that are becoming obsolete under current socio-economic developments. In the case of handicrafts it may be

necessary to look for new applications of traditional techniques, or for new forms and functions where the traditional ones have lost their appeal.

Those who prepared this assessment have regularly been confronted with people 60 years old, or older, who claimed to be among the last to still practice specific ICH expressions in Syria, or who – no longer practicing themselves – claimed to still hold the knowledge and skills required for specific practices or expressions. Many stated that young people were no longer interested in acquiring these skills and knowledge. Awareness-raising campaigns may have some value in these cases, but other solutions, too, might be considered.

For example, Syria might consider setting up its own version of a *Living Human Treasures* (LHT) system to identify and give recognition to skilful elder performers and artisans and remunerate them for transmitting their skills and knowledge to younger people. UNESCO has assisted various countries to set up such systems. Often, such systems specifically target traditional handicrafts – an example is the French system of *Maîtres d'art*.

Another option would be to develop appropriate new forms for handicraft products that are adapted to the tastes and requirements of modern society, and thus to develop new audiences or buyers for them. Traditional skills and techniques may be used for producing new products, or new designs. Syria has traditionally been strong in the domain of handicrafts, but these are reportedly now in steady decline, and – on top of that – some of the best Syrian masters are now working abroad. Still, over 100,000 Syrians are still engaged in the domain of traditional handicrafts.

UNESCO has run successful programs in numerous countries aimed at helping people skilled in traditional handicrafts to continue their practice, both by developing new designs and by developing better conditions for marketing their products.

(vi) Develop educational (awareness raising and training) programmes

Awareness raising among the public at large, with a special focus on young people, may be achieved by building in information about ICH (its diversity, values and functions in present and past) in school programmes (during, for instance, history, language and music lessons) and in non-formal educational settings. Schools may also be involved in promoting the practice of certain types of local or national ICH expressions (for instance, singing, playing traditional musical instruments, traditional games, story telling, or oral poetry). The Ministry intends to ask UNESCO for information about successful experiences with the use of educational programmes both for awareness-raising about ICH and for the transmission of skills and knowledge.

It is evident that a special awareness-raising campaign will have to be organised targeting school teachers in order to develop their interest in local expressions and traditions.

(vii) Identify governmental and non-governmental organisations and institutions active in the field of ICH; collect information about safeguarding activities, programmes and projects

Syria has already begun this activity within the framework of Phase I of the MEDLIHER project. Summaries of the first, still modest, results are shown in Annexes 1 and 2 of this assessment. It is our intention to continue collecting information on persons (researchers, community representatives, and individual practitioners) and organisations involved in safeguarding ICH in the widest sense of

this term and to collect information about safeguarding activities and programmes. Once a critical mass has been reached, the information collected will be systematised and made public in the most appropriate ways for the Syrian situation, including publication on the internet. A documentation institution, as advocated above, may engage in activities of this kind. The Ministerial Intangible Heritage Committee and the consultative / advisory body (as discussed above) will have to ensure that the information collected eventually covers all governorates, regions and communities of the country.

(viii) Develop activities to ensure the widest possible participation of communities and groups of practitioners and tradition bearers.

The Convention and its Operational Directives repeatedly stress the obligation for the States Parties, and for external organisations and persons, to always properly inform the communities and individuals concerned about intentions concerning their ICH of outsiders and to always involve them in safeguarding and other activities around their ICH. Various projects are in progress at this moment in Syria, detailed in part A of this assessment, in which different approaches are used for involving community members in identifying their heritage.

During capacity-building workshops the desirability and – in certain circumstances – the obligation of involving communities in, for instance, inventorying or safeguarding projects, should be explained to everyone working on ICH projects in Syria, and positive experiences of so doing should be communicated to them on an ongoing basis.

C.2.a.2 Priority activities and measures

In response to questions formulated in the framework of the MEDLIHER project, and based on the considerations formulated in the previous section of this chapter, the Ministry of Culture, supported by its Intangible Heritage Committee, considers that, in addition to the further development of structures and policies by the Ministry, the six safeguarding activities and measures presented below deserve priority. The first three of them deserve the highest priority.

(i) Capacity building

1. Capacity building for members of Heritage Committees in the Governorates and for civil servants working in the Popular Heritage Department of the Ministry of Culture, for experts and institutions, and for community representatives focusing on inventory making and on community involvement
2. Training workshop for experts and community members in defining and identifying ICH and in processing the collected data in forms for inventorying.

(ii) Inventorying

1. Inserting within the next two years 15 to 20 elements in a preliminary inventory of ICH present in Syria;
2. Gradually developing principles and procedures to be followed for a comprehensive inventory or system of inventories in Syria.

(iii) Listing

1. Identifying from among the inventoried elements a few that might be proposed for listing under the Convention;
2. Preparing at least one nomination file annually for each of the lists of the Convention in the next few years.

The following measures are also important:

(iv) Developing a Documentation Centre;

(v) Developing a Living Human Treasures system;

(vi) Capacity building for adapting handicrafts production and designs to new purposes and demands.

C.2.b Prospective listing

On 11 February 2010 the Ministerial Intangible Heritage Committee identified seven elements that could soon be inventoried and then be proposed for inscription on the lists of the Convention by Syria. The majority of the seven elements identified, if preserved and reinforced as living practices could contribute to maintaining the centres of our historical towns as vibrant places where tangible and intangible heritage will continue to interact, equally attractive for Syrians to live in and for tourists to visit. The seven elements selected so far are:

(i) Representative List

1. **Al-Qudud of Aleppo (also Halabi Qudud):** old popular tunes and songs used on different occasions, religious and secular, by artists and non-professional practitioners;
2. **The Damascene Arada:** Joyful processions of men in the streets of the town, accompanied by music and singing, halting at public squares for with sword dancing, performed on various occasions (for instance accompanying a bridegroom to the place of wedding, celebrating neighbourhood festivities, parading boys after circumcision);
3. **The Debke of weddings on the Syrian Coast:** A very popular line dance, performed all over Syria by men and/or women at weddings and other occasions, including national holidays and funerals, led by a ra'is, accompanied by music (various instruments are used according to the region and the occasion) and vocalisations;

(ii) Urgent safeguarding List

1. **Samah dance in Aleppo:** dance traditionally used in religious ceremonies of Sufi orders, nowadays mainly performed in some popular festivities and on stage;
2. **Story telling (Al-Hakawati):** a story teller reads or rather enacts a story at a specific hour in a café, while interacting with the audience. The story may run for weeks or months. Almost extinct;

3. **Karakoz Shadow Theatre:** a theatrical tradition involving leather (or carton) puppets manipulated by a puppeteer who adapts traditional texts to the events of the day; virtually extinct in Syria, but with good chances for successful revitalisation;
4. **Traditional silk brocade production:** a process that requires various skills, from silkworm raising to weaving, that has become rare, since most of the production is now mechanised.

(iii) Best Safeguarding Practices

The Ministerial Committee considers that it is still rather too early for the submission of Syrian safeguarding activities to the Intergovernmental Committee for selection as best practices. At a later stage, once a suitable project has been successfully concluded, Syria may, after a thorough study of the sustainability of its effects, submit such a project as a potential best practice.

C.2.c Possible priority activities for the following phases of the MEDLIHER project

We propose that the following priority tasks be undertaken in the next phases of the MEDLIHER project:

1. Capacity building and assistance for inventory making;
2. Capacity building for developing and implementing safeguarding plans (with the participation of communities, groups and/or individuals concerned);
3. Developing and implementing safeguarding plans for three endangered ICH elements;
4. Developing a documentation centre that will gradually assume various tasks as discussed in this chapter.