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联合国教育、
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**Address by Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the information meeting for Permanent Delegates and
Observers to UNESCO on the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding
of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

UNESCO, 2 June 2008

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful that so many of you responded to my invitation to participate in this information meeting. It will, I hope, enable us to review the salient aspects of the efforts made over the last two years to implement the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and serve as useful preparation for the forthcoming work of the second General Assembly of the States Parties, to be held a few days from now, from 16 to 19 June 2008.

The last information meeting on this theme was held in February 2006. We were then on the threshold of the Convention's entry into force, which occurred on 20 April 2006 with the deposit of the thirtieth instrument of ratification.

At the first session of the General Assembly two years ago, the States Parties to the Convention numbered 45. On the eve of the Assembly's second session, 95 States have now ratified it.

In view of the importance attached to cultural diversity by the international community as a whole, I am particularly pleased that the Convention, which is an important component of the standard-setting framework established by UNESCO in the field of cultural diversity, has been ratified at such a rapid pace. Clearly, by the end of the year, we will see the number of States Parties to the Convention rise to over one hundred.

I am also very glad to note that the geographical distribution of the States Parties is becoming more balanced over time. In order for genuine international cooperation to get under way, in particular the exchange of information and experience, all regions of the world must be actively involved in implementing the Convention.

Since June 2006, the Intergovernmental Committee has met four times, twice in ordinary session and twice in extraordinary session. Its very first session was held in Algeria in November 2006; China then hosted the first extraordinary session in May 2007; Japan hosted the Committee's second session in September 2007; and Bulgaria hosted its second extraordinary session in February 2008. I should like once again to express my sincere thanks to those countries for their hospitality.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

The next meeting of the General Assembly of the States Parties will signal the start of a second phase in the life of the 2003 Convention, that of its implementation.

You have no doubt received the working documents and had a chance to observe that the Assembly's agenda is mainly focused on the draft operational directives drawn up by the Committee.

The Assembly will therefore be taking decisions with regard to the selection criteria and the procedures proposed for inscription on the two lists provided for under the Convention – the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity and the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. It will also be examining the criteria for the selection of programmes, projects and activities that best reflect the principles and objectives of the Convention and the criteria that govern the granting of international assistance.

Three other important items will be examined by the Assembly: the amount of the contribution to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, the plan for using the Fund's resources and the criteria and arrangements for accreditation of non-governmental organizations to act in an advisory capacity to the Committee.

Finally, the General Assembly will carry out another important task: the election of 12 new members of the Committee to replace the outgoing members.

You will, I am certain, be devoting your full attention to the draft criteria and procedures for inscription on the Convention's two lists. The Committee has, you will note, stressed the need to distinguish clearly between the two lists and

emphasized the fundamental importance of the Urgent Safeguarding List. It has in particular pointed out that the Representative List is designed above all to give greater visibility to the intangible cultural heritage, increase awareness of its importance and promote dialogue in a framework of respect for cultural diversity.

The proposed inscription criteria, of which there are five for the Representative List and six for the Urgent Safeguarding List, are somewhat similar and complementary. The purpose of the Representative List is to ensure the visibility of elements whose viability is not in question, while the Urgent Safeguarding List provides the opportunity to strengthen the viability of endangered intangible cultural heritage elements. The entire set of the inscription criteria and procedures proposed were adopted by the Committee following intense debate.

The Committee decided, for example, to suggest that an element of the intangible cultural heritage could not appear on the two lists simultaneously. The States Parties concerned could nevertheless request that an element be transferred from one list to another, and an element could be withdrawn from a list if it no longer met one or more of the criteria for inscription on that list.

Two open lists are therefore being proposed to the General Assembly, with inscription criteria that are largely similar. It is understood, however, that priority attention must go to the Urgent Safeguarding List, which should as a consequence have more rigorous inscription procedures.

With respect to the timetable, the procedure for inscription on the two lists will not be the same.

It should be possible to complete the procedure for inscription on the Representative List in 13 months. The first elements should therefore be able to be placed on the list in autumn 2009.

Nevertheless, in accordance with the provisions of the Convention, and if the procedure for incorporation of masterpieces drawn up by the Committee in Bulgaria is adopted by the General Assembly, items that have been proclaimed masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity will be incorporated in the Representative List as from the third session of the Committee, which will be held from 4 to 8 November 2008 in Istanbul. Let me take this occasion to express my sincere thanks to the Turkish authorities for their invitation and their generous hospitality.

The procedure for inscription on the Urgent Safeguarding List should take 18 months, or 24 months where a request for financial assistance has been made.

The Committee has nevertheless proposed a special provisional timetable of 13 months for the initial inscriptions on the Urgent Safeguarding List to ensure that the process of safeguarding the elements deemed to be the most endangered gets under way as rapidly as possible.

If the various timetables are approved by the General Assembly, the Committee will then be able to inscribe the first series of candidates on the two lists in autumn 2009.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At each of its sessions, the Committee has reiterated the importance of promoting and diffusing programmes, projects and activities for the safeguarding of the intangible heritage, while taking into account the special needs of developing countries. The Committee has referred in particular to Article 18 of the Convention, considering that it is vital to raise awareness with regard to the importance of the intangible heritage and the promotion of activities to safeguard it.

The Committee is therefore submitting to the General Assembly operational directives that will enable the greatest possible number of countries to benefit from an exchange of experience and good practices.

Another of the Committee's important areas of work was the drafting of operational directives for international assistance and for the accreditation of non-governmental organizations offering advisory services to it.

International assistance, the funding for which will be provided by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund, will focus mainly on the Committee's major priorities, urgent safeguarding projects, the selection and promotion of best practices, and building the capacities of the States Parties, especially those that are developing countries.

The recommendations made by experts, at a meeting held in April 2007 in New Delhi at the invitation of the Indian Government, were of great use to the Committee in preparing the draft inscription criteria. I should like to take this opportunity to thank the Indian authorities for having agreed to host that important meeting, and to thank the Romanian and French authorities, who authorized the holding, in Bucharest and in Vitré, of two meetings on the participation of communities,

practitioners, experts, centres of expertise and research institutions in the implementation of the Convention.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As you are all aware, the General Assembly's second session, to be held in a few days, will be an important moment in the life of the Convention and will mark the start of its operational phase.

The Committee has worked conscientiously and with assiduity to produce all the documents necessary for the implementation of the Convention, just two years after its entry into force.

This is an exceptional achievement which merits acknowledgement and fully meets the expectations of the international community: it will make possible an operational implementation focused on safeguarding by and for the communities, groups and individuals who are the bearers of this living heritage. I should like in this regard to express my warm congratulations to the chairs of the Committee's four sessions without whom the task could not have been accomplished. Their dedication, wisdom and perseverance made it possible to achieve results of great quality, for which I thank them sincerely.

It is my hope now that the State Parties will approve the operational directives submitted to them and that these texts will be "tested" through experience and practice.

The intangible cultural heritage is not static but is changing constantly, and I believe that the operational directives should reflect this movement. On the basis of the lessons learned from the implementation and practical application of the Convention, the General Assembly may at a later time request the Committee to adapt the texts when the need arises.

I have asked the Assistant Director-General for Culture to kindly serve as my representative for the remainder of the meeting, which unfortunately I must leave because of commitments elsewhere. I hope that your debates will be fruitful and that, as a result, you will be fully prepared to ensure the smooth functioning of the forthcoming General Assembly of States Parties.

I thank you.