



United Nations Educational,  
Scientific and Cultural Organization

Executive Board

EX

Hundred and forty-second Session

142 EX/18  
PARIS, 10 August 1993  
Original: English

Item 5.5.5 of the provisional agenda

**ESTABLISHMENT OF A SYSTEM OF 'LIVING CULTURAL PROPERTIES'  
(LIVING HUMAN TREASURES) AT UNESCO**

**SUMMARY**

This item was placed on the provisional agenda of the 142nd session in accordance with a proposal made by the Republic of Korea in a letter to the Chairperson of the Executive Board dated 30 June 1993. The explanatory note is reproduced below.

## **A PROPOSAL TO INSTITUTE 'LIVING HUMAN TREASURES' AT UNESCO**

### **I. PURPOSE**

The General Conference adopted a Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Co-operation at its fourteenth session on 4 November 1966. The Declaration stresses that nations, through international cultural co-operation, should 'develop peaceful relations and friendship among the peoples and bring about a better understanding of each other's way of life'. The General Conference also passed a Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Cultures and Folklore at its twenty-fifth session in 1989. Its purpose was to preserve folklore of various peoples in the world. The recommendation defines folklore as follows:

'Folklore (or traditional and popular culture) is the totality of tradition-based creations of a cultural community, expressed by a group or individuals and recognized as reflecting the expectations of a community in so far as they reflect its cultural and social identity; its standards and values are transmitted orally, by imitation or by other means. Its forms are, among others, language, literature, music, dance, games, mythology, rituals, customs, handicrafts, architecture and other arts'.

The Recommendation enumerates various ways and means to preserve folklore. However, member nations have been negligent in implementing this Recommendation. I propose a system that is not explicitly mentioned in the Recommendation, but will greatly contribute to the realization of the goals and objectives of both the Recommendation and UNESCO, particularly international cultural co-operation and the creation of peace culture.

### **II. THE SYSTEM OF LIVING HUMAN TREASURES (LIVING CULTURAL PROPERTIES)**

#### **A. National list**

1. The forms of folklore in this system include only the forms of folklore which are transmitted by oral or physical performance, and therefore exclude language, literature, handicrafts and architecture.
2. 'Living human treasure' refers to a person who excels others in performing music, dance, games, plays and rituals which are of outstanding artistic and historical value in their respective countries as envisaged in the Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Cultures and Folklore.
3. Member nations designate persons who excel others in folklore as living human treasures in their respective countries. The criteria and procedure for selection will be established by individual member nations.
4. In order to establish this criteria, member nations should institute a Committee on Living Human Treasures. This Committee will consist of experts on folklore in their respective countries.
5. In selecting the living human treasures, member nations can subdivide each form of folklore and can select the living human treasures according to this classification.

6. Member nations would then submit the list of living human treasures to the UNESCO Secretariat, which will compile an integrated list and publish it. The persons on the list enjoy the UNESCO label.

#### **B. World list**

1. UNESCO can establish its own Committee on Living Human Treasures, whose functions are similar to those of the World Heritage Committee. This Committee can be integrated into the World Heritage Committee as a subcommittee.

2. The Committee on Living Human Treasures can institute a World Living Human Treasures List, similar to the World Heritage List.

3. In order to institute this system, a convention on living human treasures may be needed. Alternatively, a section or provision on this subject can be incorporated into the existing World Heritage Convention.

4. The criteria and procedures for selection can be established by the World Committee on Living Human Treasures as in the case of the World Heritage Convention.

5. For the purpose of evaluation and examination of nominations, the World Committee should co-operate with international governmental and non-governmental organizations having objectives similar to those of this Convention.

### **III. POSSIBLE DIFFICULTIES**

The national system would be easier to establish than the international system. The difficulties in both cases would be as follows:

1. Some nations may refuse to institute such systems due to internal constraints, particularly a political division. Therefore, the systems should be voluntary: member nations themselves decide whether or not to participate, as in the World Heritage Convention.
2. Member nations will have difficulties agreeing upon the criteria and procedures for selection for the international system. However, we have good experience with the World Heritage Convention. Should the establishment of an international system prove impracticable at this time, a national system can be instituted first.
3. There may exist a political controversy over the selection of living human treasures. If any member nation has such a difficulty, it may choose not to submit a list.

### **IV. IMPLEMENTATION AND BENEFITS**

1. Those inscribed on the national and international living human treasures lists would enjoy prestige in their respective countries, as do the cultural and natural properties on the World Heritage List.

2. These people should be used to transmit their artistic talent to future generations. Participating members can establish schools of folklore and use the living human treasures as

instructors. They can also be asked to perform their art or talent on various occasions, from holidays to festivals, both national and international. Participating countries may also provide them with monetary allowances if their budget allows.

3. The UNESCO World Heritage Committee can establish a fund to support this programme. However, it will be difficult to introduce a fund similar to the World Heritage Fund. Perhaps, initially the Organization can solicit voluntary contributions from States and private organizations.

4. As a pilot project, UNESCO can produce video tapes or films of the performances of living human treasures, which could then be sold.

### **Living human treasures (Living cultural properties)**

#### **A. Why do we need this?**

##### 1. Uniqueness of cultural co-operation

In the fields of education and science developed nations are mainly benefactors, while developing nations are beneficiaries.

In the field of culture developed and developing nations are both benefactors and beneficiaries.

##### 2. Promotion of mutual understanding

The purpose of protecting tangible cultural properties is mainly to promote respect for cultural diversity and enrichment of artistic values.

The purpose of protecting intangible cultural properties is not only to promote respect for cultural diversity and enrichment of artistic values, but also to promote mutual understanding of each other's way of life.

##### 3. Ideology-proof

Tangible cultural properties evoke ideological arguments.

Intangible cultural properties do not.

##### 4. Movability

Tangible cultural properties are immovable; therefore, people must come to see them.

Intangible cultural properties are movable; therefore, they can go to people.

##### 5. Transmission v. preservation

Tangible cultural properties cannot be transmitted and can only be preserved.

Intangible cultural properties can be transmitted through living human treasures.

6. Four functions

The existing systems for preserving the cultural heritage can mainly perform three functions: preservation, protection and dissemination.

This system can perform four functions: preservation, protection, dissemination and transmission.

**B. Definition of 'living human treasures'**

A person who excels others in performing music, dance, games, plays and rituals which are of outstanding artistic and historical value.

Mythology, architecture, literature and language are excluded.

**C. National list**

Individual nations compose the list.

UNESCO compiles an integrated list.

**D. World list**

A Committee on Living Human Treasures (Living Cultural Properties) similar to the World Heritage Committee will be established.

The Committee composes the list.

**E. Difficulties**

Some nations may refuse to participate. Therefore, the systems should be voluntary.

Nations may disagree on criteria and procedures for selection for the world list. Therefore, the national list can be instituted first as an experiment.

**F. Benefits**

Living human treasures enjoy prestige.

They can be used to transmit their artistic talent to future generations.

A fund for the intangible cultural heritage, similar to the World Heritage Fund, could be established.