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للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

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

Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 2 October 2009

Mr Chairperson of the Committee,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As-salam 'alaikum,

Thank you, Mr Chairman, for your touching words of welcome.

I am very pleased to join you today in Abu Dhabi at this fourth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Everyone present is aware of the significance of what has happened here this week. By making the first set of inscriptions to the two lists established by the 2003 Convention, and opening the register of good practices, it has become fully operational. I wish to extend my warmest congratulations to the 27 States Parties whose elements have been inscribed on the Representative List and the 8 whose elements have been inscribed on the Urgent Safeguarding List, as well as to the 5 countries whose best practices have been inscribed on the register. It has been an historic and emotional meeting.

There are other reasons to celebrate, too.

With 114 States Parties to date, and Haiti and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines having deposited their instruments of accession in recent days, the number of

States Parties is continuing to grow at a satisfying rhythm. The Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund has become operational, too.

But sheer numbers are not all. Its coming into force, and the speed with which it and the complementary 2005 Convention on contemporary cultural expressions have become operational, demonstrates the importance Member States attach to UNESCO's dynamic conception of culture. This is of course encapsulated in the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. With these new instruments, UNESCO's normative action now covers all aspects of the world's cultural diversity: tangible and intangible, past and present. This is a real cause for celebration.

Mr Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is no secret that I have been an ardent advocate of the intangible cultural heritage since becoming Director-General of UNESCO in 1999. I am deeply satisfied to have witnessed the first series of inscriptions of intangible heritage on the Urgent Safeguarding List and the Representative List, as well as the selection of good safeguarding practices. As I look around the hall, I see many familiar faces. I would like to thank you all sincerely for your continuous support over the years. Your expertise and diligence have made it possible for us to reach this historic juncture.

With your indulgence, I will use my time with you to reflect on the path we have travelled and the challenges ahead. These are matters that I care about dearly. Please forgive me in advance if I talk at some length.

When I was elected Director-General ten years ago, I made the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage a programmatic priority. This decision was based on my conviction that humanity can no more afford to lose its intangible than its tangible heritage, since both constitute the foundation of the world's cultural diversity so essential to humanity's sustainable future. I therefore set out to fill this lacuna in UNESCO's standard setting activities.

My devotion to intangible heritage is also based on my personal experience. I come from a region of the world that gives equal attention to both tangible and intangible heritage. And, as many of you know, before joining UNESCO I enjoyed a long

career in the foreign service of my country, Japan. As a young diplomat in the 1960's, I was based in Ghana, the first African country to gain independence after the Second World War. From there, I covered 10 African countries. I still vividly recall various cultural expressions - particularly traditional dance and music - that I witnessed in each of them. Since then, my belief in the power of the living heritage to bring people together and the significance of cultural diversity has only grown.

Over the past decade, many of you have accompanied me on the quest for the most appropriate way to safeguard intangible heritage. The path has not always been smooth. From the launch of the Proclamation of Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity Programme to the elaboration of the Convention, many cast doubts on the need to establish such an international instrument. Even at the time of adopting the Convention in 2003, some Member States remained hesitant. This week's events prove that any remaining doubts have been overcome.

While commending all States Parties, and especially the Committee, for the tremendous work undertaken since the Convention entered into force in 2006, I want to be frank and express my dismay about the marked imbalance between the Urgent Safeguarding List and the Representative List. This is particularly surprising because during the elaboration of the Convention and in adopting the Operational Directives in June 2008, many countries repeatedly emphasized that the primary aim was to safeguard living heritage facing threats of deterioration, disappearance and destruction. To that end, overriding importance was placed on the Urgent Safeguarding List.

Yet, for the first accelerated cycle of the Urgent Safeguarding List, UNESCO received only fifteen nomination files, while for the Representative List, we received 111 files. Does this mean that there are few elements of intangible heritage requiring urgent safeguarding? Does it mean that we in fact are more concerned about the Representative List than the Urgent Safeguarding List? I hope not.

On several occasions, many countries have reiterated that the Urgent Safeguarding List is the more important of the two because it can catalyze international assistance and cooperation. As we all know, developing countries can receive financial assistance for the preparation of nominations to the Urgent Safeguarding List, and endangered elements are eligible for financial assistance for the implementation of safeguarding action plans. One of the main purposes of the

Intangible Heritage Fund is to assist endangered intangible heritage, and the Secretariat is available if countries require any help in completing assistance request or nomination files.

Turning to the Representative List, which now comprises 166 elements in 77 States Parties, I reiterate my congratulations to the States Parties whose proposed intangible expressions have been inscribed. The large number of nominations submitted attests to the great interest in intangible heritage. Considering that the main purpose of the Representative List is to raise awareness about and increase the visibility of intangible heritage, I am certain that your work this week will successfully achieve this aim.

But here again, I want to express some words of caution. Looked at objectively, this crucial list is hardly 'representative' from a global perspective. The figures speak for themselves. Of the 76 inscriptions made this week and the 90 elements incorporated into the List last year, 44% are from one single region – Group IV. The rest are distributed as follows: 16.9% are from Group II; 13.3% from Group III; 10.8% from Group I; 10.2% from Group V(a) and only 4.2% from Group V(b).

The indications are that the marked geographical imbalance of these first nominations is likely to deteriorate in the future. Of the 147 nomination files received for inscription in 2010, 98 elements – or 66% - are from Group IV. Therefore, I urge all States Parties to strive to ensure greater representativeness.

This brings me to another area of concern regarding the sheer volume of nominations submitted. For this first cycle, the Secretariat managed to process all the nomination files on time, but this was only possible by mobilizing the entire staff of the Intangible Heritage Section, at the expense of other necessary activities, such as capacity-building projects in Member States. It is clear that this heavy workload is not sustainable.

While I recognise that the provisional measures you have adopted this week will help address these issues in 2010, I must be honest and admit my regret that the Committee did not come to an agreement on how to deal in the long term with the two issues of an unacceptably high level of geographical imbalance on the Representative List, and the sheer volume of nominations that far exceeds the

processing capacities of all parties concerned. We must find ways of ensuring that the Representative List is truly representative on a global scale.

Mr Chairman,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Over the last decade, I have travelled to all regions of the world in my capacity as Director-General of UNESCO. Every encounter with intangible heritage practitioners has reaffirmed my conviction that safeguarding intangible heritage is not only essential to preserving the world's cultural diversity, but also to building more effective and sustainable development strategies.

In addition to providing a sense of identity and continuity for practicing communities, and thereby enhancing overall social cohesion, intangible cultural heritage can serve the contemporary world in myriad ways. For example, in offering new insights into conflict resolution, or laying the groundwork for more sustainable natural resource management. In the field of education, integrating local intangible heritage into school curricula may increase student retention rates and ensure more relevant and inclusive educational environments.

Throughout human history, major obstacles have been overcome through collective efforts. UNESCO was established in the aftermath of the Second World War to overcome the greatest obstacle to peaceful progress: "ignorance of each other's ways" in the words of our constitution. In the field of culture, we have translated this into world wide programmes of advocacy, capacity building and training underpinned by our normative action.

There is no doubt in my mind that intangible heritage represents a positive force in the pursuit of our shared goal of building a sustainable future. This requires the participation of all stakeholders, beginning with intangible heritage practitioners, who are the main protagonists of this Convention and to whom I would like to pay heartfelt tribute. I also want to acknowledge the pivotal role of civil society and particularly NGOs who are key actors in our efforts to bridge the gap between local communities and governments.

As I prepare to leave UNESCO, I am, inevitably, reflecting on my ten years as Director-General. If asked to identify the most memorable moments, I would without

hesitation say the birth and operationalization of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. As I said at the outset, it opened up a new phase in the evolution of UNESCO's work to safeguard the world's cultural diversity, enlarging our normative action to encompass intangible as well as tangible heritage. Today, UNESCO has a comprehensive set of legal tools for protecting all aspects of humanity's cultural diversity underpinned by the mutually reinforcing and complementary conventions of 1954; 1970; 1972, 2001; 2003 and 2005. The challenge for the coming years is to establish harmonious working relationships between all of them, in particular those of 1972, 2003 and 2005.

It is important that the 1972 and the 2003 Conventions work closely together. With the current rate of ratifications, the 2003 Convention is well on its way to attaining the same level of quasi-universality as the 1972. It is therefore imperative that the two Conventions work hand in hand as the foremost international instruments for safeguarding cultural heritage. In this regard, I trust that you and your counterparts on the World Heritage Committee will refer to the 2004 Yamato Declaration on Integrated Approaches for Safeguarding Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage as a basis for future action.

This applies equally to the 2003 and 2005 Conventions, covering traditional and contemporary cultural expressions. It is important that they work hand in hand, too.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been frank about where I believe more remains to be done. But my comments have been made in the spirit of friendship and support for the importance of the task in hand.

I cannot conclude this address without once again thanking all Committee Members and Chairpersons, past and present, for having fulfilled the tasks entrusted to you with steadfast commitment. Sincere thanks also go to all States Parties who have contributed to the Convention's implementation, directly and indirectly. I sincerely hope that this instrument, which we cherish so much, will attain universal ratification in the near future and take its place alongside the 1972 Convention as one of the two most important standard setting instruments for heritage.

I would like to seize this opportunity to extend my deep gratitude to Mounir Bouchenaki, former Assistant Director-General of the Culture Sector, for having judiciously guided the Sector through the negotiation and adoption of the Convention, and of course to you, Françoise Rivière, for your outstanding leadership over the past three and a half years, which has yielded the fruits harvested at the present session.

Let me also thank Noriko Aikawa, for her hard work in assisting the development of the Convention, Rieks Smeets, for having nourished it with such dedication through its formative years; and now Cécile Duvelle and her staff, for driving it forward so energetically.

I bid you farewell with a heightened sense of accomplishment that I will treasure for the rest of my life. You may be sure that I shall remain a strong advocate for intangible heritage long after my retirement from UNESCO.

Thank you very for your attention.