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联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Address by Ms Irina Bokova,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the fifth session of
the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of
the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Nairobi, 15 November 2010

Mr Chairperson of the General Assembly of the States Parties,
Mr Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Committee,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here with you today, on African soil, for the opening of the 5th Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

I wish to extend warmest thanks to the Kenyan authorities for their legendary hospitality and efforts in making this meeting a success. We should recognise in particular the excellent work of the Ministry of State for National Heritage and Culture, through its Department of Culture, to implement the 2003 Convention, working closely with the National Museums of Kenya, which celebrates its 100th anniversary this year.

I know that under Mr Jacob Miaron's wise stewardship, the Committee's debates are in excellent hands.

The wealth of this country's cultural heritage and the warmth of its hospitality, which many of us enjoyed during Kenya Week at UNESCO Headquarters last month, are exceptional. The new national policy on culture and heritage that was adopted recently shows a true commitment to integrating culture into Kenya's development

policies and to mobilizing the necessary resources for its preservation and promotion.

I wish to express greetings also to the many ministers and eminent persons who have come to participate in this Session, to the States Parties members of the Committee, to the observers and to the many civil society organizations.

Your presence in such large numbers attests to the importance that you ascribe to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and its implementation. This is genuinely gratifying.

I wish also to thank all States that have supported and continue to support UNESCO in its efforts to safeguard the intangible heritage. I single out in particular Azerbaijan, Belgium (Flanders), the People's Republic of China, Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Spain and the United Arab Emirates. It is thanks to their combined support that we have achieved such progress. For the Convention to be implemented at the national and global levels and for all stakeholders to be mobilized, I am convinced of the current priority being given to capacity-building worldwide is absolutely correct. This is the way forward.

Nearly three years ago, in February 2008, I myself chaired the Committee's proceedings at the second extraordinary session, held in Sofia, when the Committee finalized its proposals on the Operational Directives.

The Convention has taken off since then. The Committee is now fully embarked on pursuing its long-term mission to promote and to safeguard our intangible heritage.

The Convention is one of the most innovative instruments that we have developed to address contemporary challenges. As I have said before, I see our commitment to intangible heritage as an act of solidarity, respect and understanding of others. Ratified by 132 States, some 181 elements are currently inscribed on its lists. Each of these bears witness to humanity's great diversity and its unity.

The Convention provides a forum for discovering and exploring expressions that are particular to cultures across the world. It is a tool for social cohesion and dialogue. It is also a way to highlight and safeguard practices and expressions that are vital for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In working to preserve

the environment, empower women, improve health, develop income-generating activities and foster peace-building and conflict resolution, I am convinced that the intangible heritage has enormous potential that we must learn to harness and sustain.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Committee has a heavy agenda before it.

It will be required to take decisions in particular on inscribing new elements on the two Lists established by the Convention—the Urgent Safeguarding List and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The eyes of the world are on the Committee. Many media are covering this event. Proceedings will be reported across the globe. This is a great opportunity. Decisions on inscriptions will improve understanding and increase respect for the intangible heritage and the communities that keep it alive. The Committee's decisions will help to safeguard our intangible heritage and transmit it to future generations.

With this in mind, I encourage the Committee to take the time that is necessary and to remain cognizant of the responsibility that is engaged for each element that it will decide to inscribe or not to inscribe on the Lists. The future of the Convention will be written in the ink of these decisions.

The Committee should also take a responsible approach to what is achievable during a single session. At this meeting, it is called upon to evaluate 52 files – already a significant number. I cannot see the possibility that the Committee will have to appraise 163 files next year as being realistic. This would be the case if all files received would be actually examined.

I hope that an equitable and balanced solution can be found to ensure that none of the intangible-heritage-bearing communities will feel it is being sidelined and that the Committee will be able to accomplish fully the task entrusted to it by the States Parties. The credibility of the Convention is at stake.

Last June, the General Assembly of the States Parties took measures to rationalize some of the existing procedures. I congratulate it on that score.

However, many challenges remain that must be tackled in order to enable the Secretariat to discharge its functions fully.

On this note, I wish to take the opportunity to thank the States, in particular China, that support the Secretariat and those -- such as Azerbaijan, Japan, Republic of Korea and United Arab Emirates -- that have announced their intention to do so. I hope that the letter that I have sent to some of you, requesting contributions to the sub-fund established by the General Assembly of the States Parties to support the Secretariat, will be received favourably. Without additional support, we will not be able to provide the services that so many States Parties have requested and that are essential for the full international implementation of the Convention. The future of the Convention will depend to a large extent on how we answer this question.

It is important also that the Committee will discuss inscription criteria. I am convinced of the need for such a discussion. This should be conducted in the light of experience that has been already gained.

Considering how to involve civil society in the implementation of the Convention is also vital. The place given to various intangible -heritage actors and promoters at the local level is a strength of the Convention. We can build on this. For this reason, I hope that the voices of the civil society organizations that met yesterday as a forum outside this Committee will be heard.

Recently-established intangible heritage category 2 centres can play key roles in this respect. Creating and supporting new networks of expertise and cooperation is vital for supporting this fragile heritage and giving it the exposure and status it requires.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Convention's tenth anniversary is drawing near.

You will be required to consider necessary arrangements for its celebration. I see this as an excellent opportunity to turn the spotlight on the importance of the

intangible heritage and its safeguarding – especially in terms of development, dialogue and social cohesion. The Convention is still in infancy. We bear responsibility to guide it in its first steps.

I am certain that we will look back on the first ten years of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage with a sense of accomplishment and pride. But anniversaries are also moments to take stock of the shortfalls that persist.

Not a single African nomination has been submitted at this Session. This must give us cause to reflect. We cannot avoid the responsibility that we carry to include this great continent and all other places whose rich intangible heritage are not represented in the Convention Lists as they rightly should be.

The Convention is a forum for solidarity and cooperation. All countries and all continents should feature on an equal footing.

For this reason, I look with expectation towards the ambitious capacity-building strategy that has been established, supported by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund. We must make every effort possible to ensure that all States benefit from the Convention.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, I wish to pay tribute to the Committee's 24 members who have worked tirelessly for the last two years to make the Convention a reality at the international level.

Special note goes to the six pioneers who laid the foundations. These are the six members of the Committee's Subsidiary Body, established to examine nominations for the Representative List and to make recommendations to the Committee -- Estonia, Kenya, Mexico, Republic of Korea, Turkey and United Arab Emirates.

Thanks to their outstanding work, accomplished under the wise leadership of Ms. Kristin Kuutma of Estonia, the Committee has established the first inscriptions on the Representative List and, thereby, launched the implementation of the Convention.

Our heartfelt thanks go to all of them.

I wish you every success in your important mission.

Thank you.