



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Organisation
des Nations Unies
pour l'éducation,
la science et la culture

Organización
de las Naciones Unidas
para la Educación,
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация
Объединенных Наций по
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

Intangible Heritage



Bureau of Public Information
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Intangible Heritage

The 2006-2007 Culture Programme places safeguarding the intangible heritage at the top of its list of priorities. The Convention to safeguard this heritage should be implemented in 2006.

As defined by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage, adopted by the General Conference on October 17, 2003, the Intangible Cultural Heritage is comprised of “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage”. It is sometimes called the living cultural heritage, and manifests itself in the following domains:

- oral traditions and expressions;
- music, dance and traditional theatre;
- social practices, rituals and festive events;
- knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- traditional craftsmanship.

The intangible heritage is constantly changing but some is also threatened with extinction, in part due to globalization. Yet this heritage, both living and traditional, provides a sense of identity and continuity to groups and communities and constitutes a crucible of cultural diversity.

By the end of 2005, 26 States: Algeria, Mauritius, Japan, Gabon, Panama, China, Central African Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Republic of Korea, Seychelles, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Mali, Mongolia, Croatia, Egypt, Oman, Dominica, India, Viet

Nam, Peru, Pakistan, Bhutan and Nigeria had already ratified the Convention. Thirty States Parties must ratify the document for it to be implemented. The first task will then be drafting operational guidelines for the implementation of the Convention. The guidelines will include criteria for inscription to one of two Intangible Heritage Lists established by the Convention. In the meantime, the Organization continues to lead programmes essential to the safeguarding of the intangible heritage.



Carnival of Barranquilla, Colombia,
2003 Masterpiece
(M. Ravassard © UNESCO)

PROCLAMATION OF MASTERPIECES

In 1998, UNESCO created an international distinction “The Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible

Heritage of Humanity” to distinguish the most remarkable examples of intangible heritage. The Proclamation concerns popular and traditional cultural expressions and cultural spaces (places where storytellers congregate, where rituals, markets, or festivals are held) in which popular and traditional activities regularly occur. The Convention encourages countries to draw up an inventory and to take measures to protect this heritage and to promote the participation of local artists and creators in these efforts. In 2001 and 2003, UNESCO proclaimed 47 masterpieces. The 3rd proclamation will be held on November 25, 2005. The masterpieces of the States Parties can be included on

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Examples of Masterpieces Proclaimed by UNESCO

The Carnival of Binche (Belgium) dates back to the middle Ages. It is comprised of extravagant fancy dress balls and joyous processions of the legendary character of "Gilles" composed of hundreds of people wearing wax masks topped by magnificent hats decorated with ostrich feathers.

The Andean Cosmivision of the Kallawaya Culture (Bolivia) is a coherent body of beliefs, myths, rituals, values and artistic expressions that provides an original vision of the world. This distinctive world view, derived from belief systems of ancient indigenous peoples, is manifested through traditional medicine, whose virtues are widely recognized not only in Bolivia but in the many South American countries where Kallawaya priest doctors practice. This healing art involves an exceptionally deep understanding of animal, mineral and botanical pharmacopoeia.

Woodcrafting Knowledge of the Zafimaniry (Madagascar). The Zafimaniry people live in the highland, wooded areas of southeast Madagascar. The community is the last repository of a unique woodcraft culture previously widespread on the island. The geometric motifs decorating houses, tombs, furniture, tools and daily utensils are highly symbolic and reflect the Indonesian origins of the community as well as the Arab influence in the area.

the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity established by the 2003 Convention.

LIVING HUMAN TREASURES

The "Living Human Treasures" are persons who possess, to a very high degree, the knowledge and skills required for performing or creating specific elements of the intangible cultural heritage. This programme encourages the Member States to grant official recognition to exceptionally talented tradition bearers and craftspeople and to encourage the transmission of their knowledge, know-how and skills to the younger generations. With the view to creating new "Living Human Treasures" systems in the Member States, UNESCO offers or plans to offer financial assistance either within the framework of the programme or through extra-budgetary funds which would be added to the financing provided by the normal programmes of the Organization.

LANGUAGES IN DANGER

Languages are not only used to communicate. They also transmit values, cultural expressions, and reflect a certain view of the world. The 2003 Convention tries to safeguard languages as a means of transmitting the intangible heritage. The situation is sombre: nearly half of the world's 6800 languages are doomed to disappear. One language disappears, on average, every two weeks. UNESCO is focusing

its efforts on promoting public awareness of the problem of doomed languages; local capacity building to promote appropriate linguistic policies; and mobilization of international cooperation. The Organization relies on several key documents such as the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of 2001, "*Language Vitality and Endangerment*," and, of course, on the 2003 Convention.

TRADITIONAL MUSIC

Music, along with dance, transmits spiritual and aesthetic values essential to groups and requires the most diverse knowledge. Beyond measures of conservation, transmission and documentation, UNESCO contributes to safeguarding the intangible heritage through the UNESCO Traditional Music of the World Collection. Since 1961, the Organization has recorded and promoted all types of music: popular ditties, high-brow or sacred music, rural or urban tunes, festival music, carnival songs and many other genres have been recorded for UNESCO. Most of the recordings are made in situ, in their local context, thus attesting to their central role within the community and, as such, these recordings are rare and unique documents.

Contact:

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To find out more

For all UNESCO events and programmes concerning the intangible heritage go to:
www.unesco.org/culture

Find the intangible masterpieces on:
www.unesco.org/culture/masterpieces