



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
вопросам образования,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织



Bureau of Public Information
memobpi

Cultural Diversity

Since its creation 60 years ago, UNESCO's theoretical and operational framework has evolved. Today, the recognition of and respect for cultural diversity as a factor of social cohesion, sustainable development and stability lie at the heart of national and international policy concerns.

In accordance with its Constitution, UNESCO has a dual mandate: to preserve the "*fruitful diversity of the cultures*" of its Member States, and "*to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image*". Respect for the diversity of cultures as well as freedom of expression and communication are thus considered to be the best means of achieving unity through diversity.

UNESCO has placed the pursuit of unity at the heart of its commitment as illustrated by the recognition of the equal dignity of all cultures, the protection of cultural property, the promotion of intercultural dialogue, the respect for cultural rights, the definition of cultural policies in favour of diversity, the promotion of constructive pluralism, the preservation of different cultural heritages; in short, the recognition of each culture's specific contribution to the universal civilization of humankind.

Underlying this commitment is a profound transformation of the notion of culture. The initial concept of the "fruitful diversity of cultures" – a vision of cultures as distinct and finite entities, ideally coinciding with the borders of nation-states and contributing to culture's common treasure in order to build "the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind" – has been replaced by the concept of "cultural

diversity" both "inside" and "outside" each society, regarded as the entire range of interactions between cultures, which can be revitalized through their own capacity for dialogue and openness.

Understood in this way, culture embraces much more than arts and letters. "Culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group... it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs." (Preamble to UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, 2001)



World Day for Cultural
Diversity for Dialogue and
Development is celebrated
on 21 May.
(©UNESCO)

Defending Cultural Diversity

Defending cultural diversity involves a dual challenge: on one hand, ensuring harmonious coexistence and a willingness to live together peacefully among individuals and groups from diverse cultural horizons and living in the same country; and on the other hand, safeguarding creative diversity, i.e., the many forms through which cultures find expression. It is for this reason that UNESCO is committed to the creation of an international environment founded on the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms --particularly those of minorities and indigenous peoples --

Cultural diversity

Seven International Conventions

- Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property (1970)
- Universal Copyright Convention (1952, revised in 1971)
- Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict (first protocol 1954; second protocol 1999)
- Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972)
- Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage (2001)
- Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003)
- Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005)

and contributes to elaborating policies encouraging the integration and participation of all citizens, in order to avoid divisions and conflicts arising from the "sanctification" of differences. In this way, UNESCO works for cultural pluralism, the political response to cultural diversity.

Moreover, the Culture Sector has set as one of its priorities the promotion of a global environment in which the creativity of individuals and peoples is preserved and valued. Pursuing its commitment on the intellectual, operational and normative level, UNESCO's efforts were rewarded in 2001 when its Member States unanimously adopted UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. This is the first international legal instrument devoted to all components of cultural diversity: cultural pluralism, cultural rights, creativity and international solidarity. The Declaration stresses the organic links between cultural pluralism and the flourishing of societies' creative capacities, vehicles of values, identities and meanings. This instrument thus raises diversity to the level of "common heritage of humanity", the defence of which is deemed an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity.

The Declaration is part of a set of normative instruments in which three of the seven international Conventions (see box) – corresponding to Articles 7 to 12 of the Declaration – constitute the pillars of the preservation and promotion of creative diversity: the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972); the Convention for the

Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003); and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005).

While the two Conventions concerning heritage were intended to safeguard humanity's memory and the expressions of its heritage in order to ensure their transmission to future generations, the 2005 Convention aims at protecting and promoting the diversity of cultural expressions, the results of individual or collective creativity as disseminated by contemporary vehicles of culture, namely cultural activities and goods and services. The objective of this Convention is to create an environment conducive to making the five inseparable links of the same chain – creation, production, distribution/dissemination, access to and enjoyment of cultural expressions – beneficial to all societies.

Reinforced by the development of its theoretical and operational framework and supported by its various instruments and resources, UNESCO explicitly calls upon not only States but also other actors and civil society to recognize their duty to ensure that culture, in its rich diversity, becomes an innovative arena for dialogue and mutual understanding.

Contacts :

Katerina Stenou
Director
Division of Cultural Policies
and Intercultural Dialogue
Culture sector
01.45.68.43.03

Moe Chiba
Assistant Programme
Specialist
Division of Cultural Policies
and Intercultural Dialogue
01.45.68.43.16

To Find Out More

www.unesco.org/culture and click on
cultural diversity