

UNESCO tries convincing Govt. to ratify convention to protect cultural diversity

ISLAMABAD: UNESCO has started a countrywide consultation in order to convince the Pakistani government to ratify the 'UNESCO 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions'.

Pakistan has not even become signatory to the convention though 144 countries have ratified or become signatory to it, including members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc), Afghanistan and China.

The consultation started by UNESCO is funded by the Danish Centre for Culture and Development and after sessions in Lahore and Karachi, a two-day consultation began in Islamabad on Wednesday.

"The convention provides a legal framework for the governance of culture and ensures equal respect for all cultures," said the moderator of the event, Dr Salman Asif.

Federal secretary says government is preparing to sign the convention

"The convention was passed because there was a need for an international treaty for recognising the distinctive nature of cultures, goods and customs, such as the 'ajrak', which has been used in Sindh for thousands of years," he added.

Speaking at the consultation, UNESCO representative Vibeke Jensen said cultural diversity needs to be protected or there will be no more colour left in the world.

"We cannot watch the same movie and read the same book every day as it will become boring. Cultural diversity is very important but Pakistan has not signed the convention and we have started a countrywide consultation to raise awareness about culture and its incorporation in policy making," she said.

Talking about the importance of culture, she said Pakistan had exported \$160 million worth of cultural goods in 2004, which has now increased to \$400 million. She added that Pakistani art can be found in all parts of the world and that Pakistani cultures are being discussed internationally by people like Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy and the Junoon Group.

If Pakistan ratifies the convention, non-government organisations in the country will become eligible for applying for funding for the protection of cultural diversity.

Secretary National History and Literary Division Mohsin S Haqqani said the government was committed to promoting cultural diversity. He added that the creation of a policy working

group and recommendations from these groups will help the government in adopting appropriate and transparent policies for the protection of various cultures.

He said the government was preparing for signing the UNESCO convention.

Talking to Dawn later, Mr Haqqani said though efforts were being made to ratify the convention, he cannot give the date for when this will be done.

“The cabinet’s approval is needed in order to become signatory to it and for ratifying the convention, the bill has to pass through parliament,” he explained.

Talking to Dawn, an anthropologist at the consultation, who requested to not be named, said Pakistan is a diverse country where so many tribes need attention, he said and that the government is not serious about the issue.

“If we ratify the convention, it will become our responsibility to look after endangered tribes and cultures, such as the Kalash who are close to being extinct, but we are not doing much to preserve their language and their traditions,” he said.

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