



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,  
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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

## Remarks

by

**His Excellency Ambassador Michael Worbs  
Chairperson of the Executive Board of UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the Opening of eleventh session of the  
Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the  
Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**Millennium Multipurpose Hall, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
27 November 2016**

Your Excellency, Mr Mulatu Teshome, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia  
Your Excellency Dr. Hirut Weldemariam, Minister of Culture and Tourism of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia  
Mr Getachew Engida, Deputy Director-General of UNESCO  
Mr Chairperson of the eleventh session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage,  
Distinguished Ministers,  
Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me begin by thanking Ethiopia for hosting this session, and for the warm hospitality that the Ethiopian authorities have extended to us since our arrival. It is a great privilege and honour for me to welcome all the participants at this important event on behalf of all the Members of the Executive Board of UNESCO, and in my own name.

I am especially pleased to be able to visit the wonderful city of Addis Ababa, and to be able to deliver my address here in the Millennium Multipurpose Hall.

In light of the central importance that intangible cultural heritage has for Africa as a whole, it is fitting that this should be the second consecutive year in which the session has taken place in an African country and the fourth time in the history of the Convention that the Committee meets on the African continent.

Priority Africa is one of UNESCO's two global priorities for the period 2014 to 2021, together with Gender Equality. Cooperation between UNESCO and Africa is a longstanding and extremely fruitful one, and UNESCO continues to place such cooperation at the heart of its work.

I feel that the creativity represented by intangible cultural heritage is the spark of all new ideas, and is, therefore at the heart of development. As such, emphasis should be placed on the link between '*heritage*' and '*creativity*' if we are to ensure future sustainable development remain human-centred.

'Heritage' has an innate ability to connect people to place; and intangible cultural heritage is central to human existence and is inextricably linked to all communities everywhere. It should not be perceived through a narrow prism, but should be promoted and celebrated for the diversity it also brings to the human condition.

I mention this link to communities because I would like to emphasise the importance of the NGO Forum, which took place earlier today and which continues to act as a crucial platform for communication and exchange among partners accredited to provide advisory services to the Intergovernmental Committee within the framework of the Convention.

Non-governmental organizations, along with centres of expertise and research institutes, play a truly crucial role in safeguarding our intangible cultural heritage, often acting as our eyes and ears at the local level.

The importance of their involvement must not be underestimated. Often, such organizations are best positioned to work directly with the communities themselves. Creating and promoting of networks amongst these organizations ought to be considered.

There is a continued need for States Parties to encourage the involvement of civil society actors in our joint effort to safeguard the world's intangible cultural heritage. I am sure you will agree that this shared commitment is particularly important in times of crisis, when culture comes under direct threat.

Understanding our intercultural heritage helps us to provide answers to societal challenges. However, in times of conflict or natural disaster, the fragility of humanity's intangible cultural heritage becomes sadly evident. It is therefore important that we continue to build even greater synergies amongst partners, as I mentioned earlier, not only in order to help counter the danger to cultural heritage, but also to best understand how cultural forms can contribute to social cohesion.

By sharing best practices and lessons learned, we can help mitigate today's difficulties. Solutions cannot take place merely at the technical or financial level – we need to change the way in which we think and act together and one way of doing so would be to ensure further interdisciplinarity of our efforts, seeking educational and or scientific means of protecting and promoting this heritage in danger.

In this way, strategies could be formulated to help ensure food security, for instance, or the promotion of healthier lifestyles and the safeguarding of our livelihoods.

In this regard, I would encourage UNESCO to also seek partnerships with other UNESCO networks, like University Chairs and other UN agencies to see how a better appreciation of the understanding of intercultural heritage would be of benefit to them in their own work.

Advancements are being made, notably with the adoption last year by UNESCO's General Conference of a strategy which aims to "reinforce UNESCO's action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict", by providing a comprehensive response to threats faced by culture in emergency situations by harnessing the Organization's Culture Conventions.

As you know, further attention will be given to elaborating the plan to operationalize this strategy at the coming session of the Executive Board in April next year. In the meantime, I am pleased to note that this session of the Committee will launch a general reflection on issues related to the protection of intangible cultural heritage in emergency situations.

Before concluding, allow me to say a word on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which represents an ambitious and critical plan for fostering progress over a fifteen-year period in the area of sustainable development.

The 2030 Agenda expanded the scope of the previous Millennium Development Goals to include 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

The 2003 Convention is well suited to this new international context, since the Operational Directives for its implementation were recently revised to include a new chapter on 'safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development at the national level'. The international community now has a tool to help demonstrate the role of intangible cultural heritage as a driver of sustainable development.

In this regard, it might be helpful if case studies were developed that clearly identify the contributions that intangible heritage make to the sustainable development of local or regional communities, clearly demonstrating to the States Party to the Convention just how concrete and operational it could be.

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Today's meeting, Ladies and Gentlemen, is taking place at a critical juncture in UNESCO's history. We are in the process of elaborating UNESCO's Programme for the next four years and its Budget for the next two. The priorities we identify – that will constitute UNESCO's core work to 2021 – must receive adequate financial resources if we are to meet the expectations that these priorities imply.

UNESCO's potential to bring about change cannot and must not be measured or quantified only in monetary terms. UNESCO is an influential soft power actor when it comes to building inclusive, united societies and promoting solidarity through the promotion of knowledge and the crafting of innovative policies. UNESCO is, and must remain, a pioneer as a laboratory of ideas and a crucial hub for normative instruments in its fields of competence.

Let me say that Culture, and in particular the active implementation of its Conventions, continues to be a priority for the Members of the Executive Board.

Thank you for your attention.