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**Message from Mr Koïchiro Matsuura,
Director-General of UNESCO,
on the occasion of the first extraordinary session
of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding
of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Chengdu, China, 23 May 2007

A little over a year ago, on 20 April 2006, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage entered into force. Its exceptionally rapid ratification testifies to the importance ascribed to it by the international community.

I am particularly gratified today that China is hosting the first extraordinary session of the Intergovernmental Committee. Possessing as it does an outstanding living heritage, China can be proud that four of its traditional expressions have been proclaimed by UNESCO as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

For many years China's actions to promote the intangible heritage have been exemplary: its commitment to the safeguarding of intangible heritage through specific and effective measures is evident, as are its signs of international solidarity.

By inviting the Intangible Heritage Committee to hold its first extraordinary session on Chinese soil, China – the sixth State to have ratified the 2003 Convention – has expressed its will to play a leading role in promoting and securing recognition of the value of intangible heritage, both locally and globally.

Thanks to the efforts of all, including UNESCO, the protection of the heritage in all its forms and all its expressions is widely reflected in national cultural or development policies; furthermore, it has become one of the priorities of international cooperation.

The Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage states, in its preamble, that intangible cultural heritage is “a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development”.

As a powerful force in revealing the human creative genius, intangible heritage leaves its mark on the identity of communities, groups and individuals. Handed down from generation to generation, it provides each of us with that feeling of continuity which gives meaning to sustainable and human development.

I extend to all of you – members of the Intergovernmental Committee, representatives of States Parties to the Convention, representatives of Member States of UNESCO and non-governmental organizations – my wishes that the first extraordinary session will be a success in every respect. I should like once more to thank the People's Republic of China for so generously hosting the session.

I am certain that the talents that each of you possess will combine to break new ground and substantially advance reflection on how best to implement the Convention.