**Chengdu International Conference on Intangible Cultural Heritage   
in Celebration of the Tenth Anniversary of UNESCO’s Convention   
for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**Chengdu, China, 14 to 16 June 2013**

**Round-table 2: Inventorying and listing**

*This document presents an imaginary report of the Convention’s first decade as events might have unfolded if the Convention had been adopted without Article 16 (Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity) and Article 17 (List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding).*

The tenth anniversary of the Convention’s adoption by the 32nd session of the General Conference of UNESCO on 17 October 2003 offers an auspicious occasion to look back at the Convention’s accomplishments and challenges during its first decade.

The Convention entered into force on 30 June 2006, three months after the deposit of the 30th instrument of ratification with the Director-General. At the first session of the General Assembly of the States Parties in Paris in July 2006, the first Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was elected, and was asked to elaborate draft Operational Directives for the implementation of the Convention, notably the framework for International Assistance and the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices, the criteria for accreditation of non-governmental organizations and directives to guide other forms of international cooperation in safeguarding.

Between October 2006 and March 2008, four successive sessions of the Committee worked on the draft directives concerning the criteria and procedures for International Assistance and for selecting programmes, projects and activities to be included in the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices. In order to evaluate such requests and proposals, the Committee proposed to establish a consultative body, as provided in Article 8 of the Convention, to be composed in the long term of NGOs accredited to provide advisory services to the Committee. Since the process of accreditation by the General Assembly could not see its first results until 2010, the Committee proposed that on an interim basis the consultative body also include individual experts, until an adequate number of NGOs had been accredited from the six regions. The criteria and procedures for accrediting NGOs, and a first set of directives providing for mechanisms of international cooperation other than financial assistance were also drafted. Bringing together the Convention’s Article 7 (‘Functions of the Committee’) and Article 19 (‘Cooperation’), the Committee proposed draft directives to establish an ambitious knowledge management system for the Convention in order to promote ‘the exchange of information and experience’ (Article 19.1) and proposed for the Secretariat to undertake a range of ‘joint initiatives’ (Article 19.1) among States Parties, notably to strengthen national capacities for safeguarding. The first plan for the use of the resources of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund was proposed to the General Assembly, setting aside a share of the funds for such purposes.

When the General Assembly convened its second session in June 2008, it was eager to adopt the draft Operational Directives on International Assistance that provided a streamlined procedure for emergency assistance. It also adopted the other directives proposed by the Committee, allowing the various mechanisms of international cooperation envisioned by the Convention to become operational. It further requested the Committee to return to the next session of the General Assembly with additional directives concerning cooperation for ensuring better visibility of intangible heritage and enhanced awareness of its significance and other directives concerning the place of intangible heritage in formal and non-formal education. Last but not least, the General Assembly adopted an emblem for the Convention, the result of a juried international competition that saw more than a thousand entries from more than a hundred countries.

The Committee’s third session in October 2008 saw the first cycle of accreditation of NGOs: 35 requests from every region of the world were recommended to the General Assembly for accreditation as possible members of the Consultative Body. The first such body was constituted by the Committee for the 2009 cycle of requests and proposals, composed of individual experts until the first NGOs would be accredited. The same session saw the elaboration of draft directives regulating the use of the new Convention emblem and a first set of proposals for increasing visibility at the international level. The Committee devoted a full day to discussing the Secretariat’s proposal of a global capacity-building strategy, as foreseen in the Operational Directives adopted in June. Members welcomed the strategy’s focus on strengthening national capacities to address the safeguarding obligations that States Parties take on by ratifying the Convention, as laid out in the Convention’s Articles 11-15. Indeed, several States indicated that they would contribute funds so that the strategy could get underway without delay.

The year 2009 was an eventful one for the Convention. Throughout the year, the Secretariat balanced the work of treating requests for International Assistance and proposals of Best Safeguarding Practices with the initial implementation of the capacity-building strategy. Eager to see those mechanisms of international cooperation operational as soon as possible, the General Assembly had adopted an accelerated schedule for the first 2009 cycle; the 2010 cycle thus overlapped, with requests and proposals due in March 2009. Given that the entire process was new, the Secretariat also had to put in place the information systems and internal procedures to manage the dossiers, provide the desired feedback to submitting States, and make the files available to the Consultative Body and later to the Committee. All of this while also developing an ambitious curriculum for a series of capacity-building activities on national implementation of the Convention, inventorying, policy reform and other safeguarding measures. Fortunately, just as several States had generously stepped forward to pledge funds to support the capacity-building strategy, they and others responded to the Secretariat’s staffing constraints through loaned personnel and secondments.

When it met in October 2009, the Committee examined the first recommendations from its Consultative Body. Twelve States had requested international assistance – ten of them for inventory-making, and three from African States – and nine proposals had been submitted for the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices. The Consultative Body, and the Committee in turn, regretted that the majority of the assistance requests could not be approved because of weaknesses in the planning and budgeting of activities, and they emphasized the importance of rapidly implementing the capacity-building strategy. Nevertheless, three of the requests were approved, including two from Africa. As to the Best Safeguarding Practices, the Committee chose two exciting programmes that strengthened intangible cultural heritage transmission through formal and non-formal education. The Committee also adopted a set of draft Operational Directives on intangible heritage and education, as requested by the Assembly, emphasizing the necessity for close cooperation at the national and international levels between experts and institutions from the two fields so that intangible cultural heritage could be systematically integrated into primary and secondary curricula as well as systems of lifelong education.

The first months of 2010 saw the roll-out of a worldwide ‘training of trainers’ effort to constitute a corps of expert facilitators knowledgeable about the Convention and the capacity-building curricula. Six workshops were organized, providing training to some 65 experts from every region as well as to UNESCO field office colleagues. The curriculum materials that had been elaborated the previous year by a team of experts were available in English, French and Spanish versions, with Russian and Arabic following later in 2010. Work continued through the year with the 2010 cycle of files (14 for International Assistance and again 9 for the Register of Best Practices). March also saw the arrival of new files for the 2011 cycle, with 17 States requesting International Assistance and 12 new proposals for the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices, a steady increase in interest from States Parties.

An important test of the Convention’s effectiveness in responding to emergencies threatening intangible heritage came with the disastrous Haiti earthquake of 12 January 2010. In May the Secretariat dispatched a mission of international experts to work alongside Haitian counterparts to develop a recovery strategy for Haitian intangible cultural heritage – and to identify ways for intangible heritage to figure centrally into the larger recovery strategy being formulated for the country. By July the first intangible heritage project was operational: an innovative effort to mobilize earthquake survivors in resettlement camps to document their own heritage through audio and video recording, modelled after a programme that had enjoyed great success in New Orleans and Houston in the wake of the Katrina and Rita hurricanes of 2005. Haitian and international experts also worked together to elaborate an emergency request for international assistance focussed on restoring the human and institutional capacities relating to Vodun practices, given their important place both in Haitian identity and in individual psychological wellbeing.

The General Assembly convened in June 2010 for its third session, at which it welcomed the Committee’s report on the implementation of the Convention thus far, particularly emphasizing the importance of the global capacity-building strategy. The Assembly adopted the additional chapters of Operational Directives regulating the use of the emblem, those concerning visibility and those concerning intangible heritage and education. It further charged the Committee to organize a multi-year series of expert meetings on the two related topics of intangible heritage and sustainable development and intangible heritage and climate change, possibly leading to draft Operational Directives or other recommendations that could be addressed to States Parties.

The relevance of environmental issues became immediately apparent a few weeks after the Assembly, with the devastating Pakistan floods of July and August 2010. The Secretariat collaborated closely with the Pakistani authorities to begin to develop a comprehensive response. UNESCO constituted a team of international specialists experienced in safeguarding intangible heritage in the wake of natural disasters, including some who had previously worked on recovery from the great Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, dispatching them to work alongside Pakistani specialists to assess the situation and to prioritize interventions. Together they elaborated an emergency request for international assistance to be presented to the Bureau. The emergency assistance was modest – US$300,000 – but important, as the Pakistani authorities emphasized, in part because it demonstrated international solidarity but especially because it provided an institutional framework for national experts and international experts to work side-by-side with one another and to exchange knowledge and experience.

The Committee’s fifth session took place in October 2010. In its report to the Committee, the second Consultative Body shared the regret of its predecessor that more of the International Assistance requests could not be recommended for funding, particularly since the work proposed in most of them involved inventorying, a fundamental tool for effective implementation of the Convention at the national level. The Committee took note of the substantial progress reported to it by the Secretariat in the early roll-out of the global capacity-building strategy and expressed confidence that the solution to the problem was underway, even if it might take more time to begin to see its first fruits. Emergency assistance was approved for the Haitian project, and four other assistance requests were granted. Three projects were selected for the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices, focussing again on the relation between intangible heritage and formal and non-formal education.

By the time of the Committee’s sixth session in Bali, Indonesia, in October 2011, capacity-building activities were well underway in more than 20 countries worldwide, including 8 in Africa, and projects were under development for another 30 countries. These typically involved a multi-year collaboration between UNESCO and the beneficiary State focussing on policy reform, institution-building, and strengthening of human capacities. A full-day thematic debate was devoted to the results of the series of expert meetings in 2010 and 2011 on sustainable development and climate change. And the Committee took note with great satisfaction that the 100th instrument of ratification had been deposited just days previously – twice as fast as the rate of ratification of the 1972 Convention and four times as fast as that of the 1970 Convention.

The year 2012 was once again a busy one for the Convention, with the fourth session of the General Assembly in June and the seventh session of the Committee in October. The Assembly enthusiastically endorsed the Committee’s report on the thematic debate on sustainable development and climate change and called for work to continue with a view to integrating those topics fully into the capacity-building strategy and to prioritizing them as subjects for International Assistance and Best Safeguarding Practices.

The Convention’s demonstrated effectiveness in mobilizing innovative and culturally appropriate responses to natural disasters were very much in mind when the Côte d’Ivoire authorities and the United Nations offices concerned approached UNESCO in early 2012 for the Convention’s possible collaboration in that country’s peace-building process. Together, the three partners devised a groundbreaking programme to contribute to the consolidation of peace in the country by revalorizing the traditional social functions of a group of initiated hunters who had been mobilized during the civil war as irregular armed forces, by strengthening their roles as healers, ethno-botanists, blacksmiths, griots, ritual specialists and guardians of social order and by reinforcing the practice and transmission of their intangible cultural heritage. The Convention also played a central role in UNESCO’s response to the crisis and conflict in Mali, with Malian authorities repeatedly emphasizing that the impacts of the crisis were first and foremost on the people in the conflict zone and that intangible heritage offered time-tested means of conflict avoidance, dispute resolution and peace-building.

When it met for its seventh session in October 2012, the Committee for the first time found itself in a position to approve the majority of the International Assistance requests it examined – tangible evidence, if more were needed, that the Convention’s global capacity-building strategy was bearing fruit. Of the seven successful requests, fully five came from African States that had benefitted from the initial capacity-building activities. Even though not all requests were successful, the Consultative Body and Committee took note of the dramatically improved quality of most submissions.

As the Convention now celebrates its tenth anniversary in 2013, it numbers 113 States Parties from every region of the world that have come together to support its mission of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage of humanity. Capacity-building efforts are completed or underway in 60 countries, half of them in Africa, so that States Parties can develop the institutional and human resources to implement the Convention effectively at the national level. Even if still young, the Convention has amply demonstrated the ‘invaluable role of the intangible cultural heritage as a factor in bringing human beings closer together and ensuring exchange and understanding among them’ (Preamble) and has acquitted the faith placed in it by the international community. Its framers are to be congratulated for their foresight and their insistence on keeping the Convention sharply focussed on its primary purpose of safeguarding.

*In reality, the story is somewhat different: the Convention today numbers 153 States Parties rather than the 113 described here. Interest from States Parties in the Register of Best Safeguarding Practices and International Assistance has been substantially less than reported above. Conversely, the Representative List and Urgent Safeguarding List have attracted widespread interest both from States Parties and from the international media and general public. The Convention has managed to embark successfully on its global capacity-building strategy, albeit on a slower schedule than described in this report. Other opportunities to intervene in the wake of natural disasters or in post-conflict situations, and activities to address climate change mitigation and sustainable development, still need to be addressed.*