**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 4: Safeguarding experiences in the States Parties**

The 2003 Convention has seen an unprecedented rate of ratification among UNESCO’s complement of cultural conventions, with more than 150 States Parties at the time of the conference. In some States, ratification has been accompanied by long-term policies and strategies for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage or has been part of a national legal and policy strategy for integrating culture into larger development agendas. The implementation process has been differently defined and developed in different States. Some have started with awareness-raising and information campaigns; others, by focusing directly on national inventories or on nominations for the international lists. What are the diverse safeguarding experiences of the States Parties? Are there some that they would highlight as successful and other things they would have done differently? This session offers an occasion for representatives of selected States to share concrete experiences and lessons learnt in implementing the Convention at the national level.

Two aspects of the 2003 Convention are particularly important in examining the safeguarding experiences of the States Parties. First, it is important to recall that the Convention defines safeguarding as ‘measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage’ (Article 2). This view is resolutely forward-looking and oriented towards sustainability: safeguarding activities under the Convention are not defensive or nostalgic, but are aimed at strengthening the continued practice and transmission of heritage and increasing the possibilities for future generations to enjoy the heritage inherited from previous generations. Second, the Convention insists that safeguarding is first and foremost the province of the communities, groups or individuals concerned and it therefore emphasizes the necessity of the widest possible community participation in safeguarding activities. By underlining the rights as well as the responsibilities of culture bearers on all levels, the Convention challenges established notions of authority over cultural decision-making and calls for new institutional structures, values and safeguarding actions.

Experience has shown that there is no such thing as a uniform approach to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Countries are safeguarding within a great variety of contexts, the differences being related to political structures, social realities as well as geographical and environmental factors. In what manner have the States Parties given life to the Convention so far?

**Laws, policies and institutions**

Each State Party that has ratified the Convention has the responsibility of taking the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present on its territory. In terms of legal, administrative and economic conditions, some countries have been able to act within their existing frames, while others have seen a need for change.

Some countries have laws specifically aimed at safeguarding intangible cultural heritage – even some that pre-date the adoption of the Convention – while others have revised existing legislation or enacted new legislation subsequent to ratification. In many countries safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is fully integrated into larger development agendas. On the other hand, some countries have questioned the necessity of legislation aimed specifically at intangible cultural heritage, arguing that already-existing legislation is sufficient. The results of legislation and planning aimed specifically at safeguarding intangible cultural heritage have often lifted that safeguarding to a higher and more effective level. Could it be that just as the creation of new terminology was necessary to establish a more adequate understanding of intangible cultural heritage, so new legislation is needed to reflect the specific approaches and methodologies that safeguarding intangible heritage requires?

In most States Parties, an overall cultural policy body, often the Ministry of Culture, is responsible for the institutional aspects of safeguarding and management of intangible heritage. These tasks are often solved by a cultural heritage directorate, or an inter-ministerial committee or similar body, with the responsibility of drawing up safeguarding and management plans, developing legislation, managing inventorying, overseeing research and documentation, raising awareness and providing financing.

In some countries, policy-making and safeguarding activities are decentralized to a lower administrative authority, on either a provincial, regional or local level. For instance, local authorities such as city councils and municipalities often play key roles in supporting the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. The same goes for traditional community-level management, the traditional managers in some countries being recognized both by the State and by the community. What are the experiences of States Parties concerning traditional community-level management as compared to other management? How do communities function and do they create different forms of, and results of, safeguarding?

**Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)**

Within the Convention, the only function specifically assigned to NGOs is to participate in identifying and defining various elements of the intangible cultural heritage present in a country’s territory (Article 11). Yet in many countries, NGOs already have lengthy experience in safeguarding intangible heritage and are proven partners both of States and of communities. In many cases NGOs play a key role in connecting different institutional levels. How do States Parties cooperate with NGOs in order to achieve the goals of the Convention and how do they benefit from the NGO’s roles and positions? How have NGOs contributed to the effective implementation of the Convention? And how, in particular, have they managed to acquit their tasks of identifying and defining intangible cultural heritage, for instance when it comes to taking account of the different and diverse communities, groups and individuals?

**Communities, groups or individuals**

Communities, groups or individuals represent an essential aspect of the Convention. Not only are they essential participants in the recognition, identification and definition of intangible cultural heritage (Articles 2 and 11), their active involvement in the management of intangible cultural heritage in general is specified in article 15. The culture practitioners and bearers are the core of intangible cultural heritage and their active participation is invaluable both in defining intangible cultural heritage as well as in its safeguarding. This special bond between communities and intangible cultural heritage is emphasized by values, identity, enhancement and engagement, which together ensure the sustainability of the latter.

The active role of communities, groups or individuals captures the spirit of the Convention. As noted above, this bottom-up approach challenges top-down structures of both thinking and acting. How do States Parties see the role of communities, groups or individuals? What does it mean in practice, from the viewpoint of a State Party, to include communities in all safeguarding measures? How do communities exercise the specific roles recognized in the Convention? What challenges do they face in carrying out the responsibilities assigned to them in the Convention and by States Parties? What are good examples of constructive cooperation between States Parties and communities?

**Safeguarding through inventorying**

Most of the States Parties that have ratified the Convention have initiated the inventorying process (Articles 11 and 12). In what way have States Parties institutionalized this overall and concrete safeguarding measure? How has the drawing up of inventories been regulated in policy and legislation? And how is the inventorying process solved in real life?

The aim of inventorying is to ‘ensure identification with a view to safeguarding’. On the one hand, identifying intangible cultural heritage could easily become an action enclosed within the traditional frames of categorization, protection and conservation. On the other hand, if thoroughly taking into consideration the living and democratic aspect of the inventories, identification could be a constructive, dynamic and on-going process. How do States Parties integrate inventorying into safeguarding activities? With ‘process’ and ‘participation’ being the key words of this task, how do States Parties understand it? And do they see the latter as a challenge or a possibility in terms of methodological approaches and actions?

**Safeguarding through education and awareness-raising**

Many States Parties have decided that reinforced transmission of intangible heritage should be included within the frames of the formal educational system. The knowledge of intangible cultural heritage has often had difficulty finding a place in the formal educational system and in many countries it has traditionally been consigned to the peripheries of the curriculum as a ‘lower’ form of knowledge or art. Today, however, several countries are incorporating intangible cultural heritage into their education systems in different ways and higher education institutions, universities or specialist conservatories and heritage institutions offer teaching related to intangible cultural heritage.

Cultural centres and museums also contribute to transmission by organizing training sessions where bearers of intangible cultural heritage teach and present their knowledge. Such institutions also arrange exhibitions, markets and festivals, which can also contribute to mutual appreciation and respect among diverse communities.

What are the main challenges with safeguarding through education? Are some educational systems better ‘hosts’ of intangible cultural heritage than others? Homes, families and local communities have always been important arenas for transmission of intangible cultural heritage. How best can they be reinforced, even if the transmission of certain cultural expressions may need to be institutionalized in more formal educational systems in order to continue living?

**Safeguarding through international cooperation**

As a phenomenon of communities, groups or individuals, intangible cultural heritage is not limited by national borders. This provides a large scope of opportunity for parties – local, regional or national – to cooperate across national frontiers. International cooperation has a key role to play in developing capacities, sharing experiences and identifying good practices (article 19). Taking in consideration the core of the Convention that focuses on ensuring the viability of intangible heritage, international cooperation should proceed on many fronts simultaneously, and in every direction: each State has something to teach and something to learn. How have States Parties integrated international cooperation into their implementation of the Convention at the national level? How do international efforts complement and benefit national efforts?

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The present session offers representatives of selected States Parties an occasion to share their own recent experiences in implementing the Convention at the national level, to call attention to practical strategies for strengthening such safeguarding and to identify the challenges they continue to face. In that sense, it embodies the Convention’s fundamental principle that ‘the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage is of general interest to humanity’ and tangibly demonstrates the undertaking of States that ratify the Convention ‘to cooperate at the bilateral, subregional, regional and international levels’ (Article 19.2).