

**Speech of H.Exc. Mr Omolewa**  
**Ambassador and Permanent Delegate of Nigeria to UNESCO**  
**President of the General Conference**

**on the occasion of the closing session (10 June 2004)**  
**of the Regional Meeting for the Promotion**  
**of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**  
**Dakar, 8-10 June 2004**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have now reached the end of this seminar which is the first of a series of eight regional meetings for the promotion of the Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage that ultimately will cover all regions of the world.

I am honoured to be here today for the closure of this meeting which was attended at a very high level, first of all by the host country through Her Exc. Ms Safiétou Ndiaye Diop, Minister of Culture of Senegal, and also by the experts from so many African countries. Moreover, the importance given to the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage is highly stressed by both the quality of the experts present and by the level of the debates which have taken place during the last two days.

I have heard the reports about the debates and I have followed, as much as possible, the presentations and the discussions; I did so with great attention but also with emotion, as I was President of the General Conference during which the Convention was unanimously adopted, i.e. at its 32<sup>nd</sup> session last October.

On the first day of the meeting, the importance of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage was deeply stressed by the representatives of UNESCO, both Mr Mounir Bouchenaki and Mr Riëks Smeets. Among others, we have been reminded of the different steps, from a historical point of view, which have led to the adoption of the Convention. Without a real awareness and deep concern among the Member States the adoption of such an important instrument, after only two years of debates held both at the expert and intergovernmental level, would not have been possible.

Through the different interventions and notably the one delivered by H. Exc. Mr Yai on the domains of the intangible cultural heritage, the great variety and richness of the African intangible cultural heritage was highly emphasized.

Let me take this opportunity to warmly thank my dear friend Mr Yai who played such an important role in the process of elaboration of the Convention, first as an expert in the first round of meetings which were held, then in the intergovernmental meetings, and finally as Chairperson of the Commission of Culture of the last General Conference of UNESCO, during which the adoption of the Convention was discussed at length.

Although the Convention has not yet entered into force, I was also impressed during the thematic debates by the large number of countries represented here which have already started preparing inventories and other actions, foreseen in the Convention as the first obligation of States Parties. The identification process of the intangible cultural heritage is a preliminary step but also a main safeguarding activity to be undertaken by all States Parties. Besides the experiences presented in the field of inventory-making, this meeting was also the occasion of an interesting and fruitful sharing of experiences developed in the framework of the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage at large. This gives us a clear sign that the international co-operation foreseen under the umbrella of the Convention is already a reality in Africa and may be further developed.

I was also impressed by the fact that so many thoughts were already given to national legal provisions concerning the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage; your reactions to the presentations by Mr Guido Carducci showed your keen interest for this

subject, as well as for the ways in which your countries can prepare themselves to adhere to the new Convention.

The importance given to the intangible cultural heritage in Africa is also greatly highlighted by the still growing number of African candidatures announced for the third and most probably last Proclamation of the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

On the basis of our debates, I am deeply convinced that the Convention will shortly enter into force, most probably by early 2006. Let me remind you that three months after the deposit of the thirtieth ratification, the Convention will effectively enter into force. As you know the entry into force is only a very first prerequisite before the implementation of the Convention. This implementation will start with the holding of the first General Assembly of States Parties which will elect the members of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. There is no doubt that the first members of this Committee will play a very crucial role in the implementation of the Convention, as they will have to take decisions and give orientations on key issues such as the criteria of inscription on the two lists, on the use of the Fund, on the conditions for the international assistance, etc.

Le nombre d'Etats membres ayant d'ores et déjà annoncé leur souhait de ratifier la Convention dans les meilleurs délais, parmi lesquels figurent nombre de pays africains, laissent augurer une entrée en vigueur à un horizon rapproché. Je reste donc convaincu que notre continent sera largement représenté au sein de la première Assemblée générale des Etats parties et surtout siègera en nombre conséquent parmi les premiers membres du Comité intergouvernemental dont je ne saurai trop rappeler l'importance pour l'avenir de la Convention.

Permettez-moi à nouveau d'adresser, cette fois-ci en votre nom à tous, nos plus sincères remerciements pour l'organisation d'une telle réunion, tout d'abord au pays hôte de

cette réunion, le Sénégal, ainsi qu'à l'UNESCO et tout particulièrement au bureau de l'UNESCO de Dakar.

Enfin je vous adresse mes plus vifs remerciements pour votre participation non seulement active à cette réunion mais aussi et surtout fructueuse.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.