



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,
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للتربية والعلم والثقافة

联合国教育、
科学及文化组织

**Fourth session of the General Assembly
of the
States Parties to the Convention
for the Safeguarding of the
Intangible Cultural Heritage**

UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, 4 June 2012

Welcoming Address

by

**H.E. Ms Katalin Bogayay
President of the General Conference**

Dear Mr Toshiyuki Kono,
Dear Director-General of UNESCO,
Dear Chairperson of the Executive Board,
Dear Assistant Director-General for Culture
Dear Ms Cécile Duvelle,
Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am coming from the land of Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály. They honoured and understood very well the importance of preserving musical traditions and collected folk songs, from within and outside Hungarian culture. By incorporating many of these tunes in their work, these composers were able to preserve for us, for a later generation, a cultural treasure that would have otherwise disappeared. The intangible cultural heritage of the villages has influenced and inspired 20th century modern music in that sense. Safeguarding intangible cultural heritage can be a creative process, indeed, that allows this heritage to grow and be constantly recreated.

And I come from the land that gave birth to the Dance House movement – which is now on the best practices list of ICH – which aims to bring people together to share their joys, sorrows, feelings, through the dance and music. The dance house is open to everybody to participate.

Culture, and specifically intangible cultural heritage, is a tool to bring about peaceful global transformation.

I am therefore especially delighted to welcome all of you today to this important Session. Your overwhelming interest and support of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage is clear – we have 143 ratifications to this day, and the number keeps growing. I am happy to see the non-Party observers also attending this meeting, and hope that this will be a step for them towards joining the Convention.

Not even a decade has passed since the adoption of the Convention by the General Conference in 2003 but the document has already proven its indispensable role in helping us preserve the precious diversity of intangible cultural expressions around the world. The role of the Convention will certainly grow further with the accelerating trends of globalization. As our human family becomes more global, we have an important task and opportunity to open ourselves up and establish peaceful relations with those that come from different cultural backgrounds.

I have often stressed the intimate linkages between the notions of respect for the diversity of intangible cultural heritage and the culture of peace. Intangible cultural heritage plays a crucial role in forming people's identities. When people are secure in their own identity within a larger social context, they will be more open and respectful towards different cultural traditions, and less receptive to ideas of hate, intolerance, discrimination and violence. It is through culture that we acquire awareness of who we are, become conscious of the diversity of identities and value systems shared by others, and find a satisfactory intellectual, emotional, ethical and spiritual existence. In this sense, preserving the diversity of our intangible cultural heritage, with its potential to channel human energy away from conflict and towards cooperation, is part and parcel of our struggle for "culture of peace".

Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage is a complex task that calls for close cooperation among all relevant stakeholders, including the civil society, as well as the Governments, who have a duty to ensure that NGOs and local communities are fully involved in the process, into the implementation of this Convention.

Such close collaboration between the civil sector and the government was precisely the aim behind my support, as an Ambassador of Hungary, to the first Forum of NGOs working in the field of intangible cultural heritage, which enabled 10 African NGOs to meet and to participate in the Fifth Session of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Committee in Nairobi, Kenya. I am delighted that the Forum has met for the second session in Bali last November, and that the list of accredited NGOs under this Convention is growing larger, representing all regions of the world.

Hungary has been closely engaged with the Convention from its very elaboration, and continues to regard it as one of the key instruments for the preservation of intangible heritage. As you know, Hungary was a member of this Assembly from 2006 to 2010, during which it actively contributed to the implementation of the Convention. I wanted to take this opportunity to announce the intention of Hungary to re-join the Committee in 2014.

Dear Colleagues,

Today, you are facing a very important task. Bringing this Convention forward and translating it into reality means giving the means to thousands of people to keep their heritage alive and enjoy it for their present and the future. It is also making sure that our children will benefit from the extraordinary diversity of the world's cultural heritage.

We have reached the vital stage of the implementation of the Convention. It's our responsibility to ensure the future credibility of this Convention, which is extremely important to all the States that have ratified it. We have the responsibility of turning this Convention into an efficient, practical and concrete tool for safeguarding our heritage.

I would like to stress that what matters to our Convention is the art of doing things, the rituals, the knowhow, as well as the symbolism and significance they carry for the custodian community. We should pay particular attention to avoid the commercialization of the use of the emblem of the Convention.

We should never forget that this emblem represents the very essence of us. It represents the ingredients that shape our identity.

This emblem represents a signal, a message to the future generations about us, who we were, how we lived, what we did. This is precisely why your work, Ladies and Gentlemen, my dear friends, is an important part in the process of writing the history of the human race.

I wish you a very successful session.

* * * * *