**Speech by DDG**

**Opening of tenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**(Windhoek, Namibia)**

**30 November 2015**

[protocol]

It is a privilege for me to open the tenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

As Deputy Director-Genreal of UNESCO, I am honoured to be a part of this year’s session of the Committee and would like, first of all, to thank our host the Government of Namibia.

Madam Amulungu, you and your team have invested immense energy in organizing this important event. Since my arrival, I have been touched by the warm welcome, enthusiasm and hospitality shown by Namibian authorities. I have also been impressed by the exceptional beauty of this country.

May I also take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you for your participation. Delegates here today come from all corners of the world and I appreciate that many of you have journeyed far to be with us in Windhoek. It is particularly encouraging to see representatives from so many African countries.

It is fortunate indeed that we are gathering for the third time in Africa – home to a diverse range of traditions, practices, knowledge and skills that are so vital for the identity and continuity of communities they belong to – which is precisely why we are here, to help ensure that such living heritage can continue for the benefit of future generations.

The 2003 Convention as a normative instrument is pioneering, human-centred and forward-looking and it is for these reasons that it is strongly supported by UNESCO Member States. In this context, allow me to extend a warm welcome to Kuwait and Marshall Island, which joined the ‘intangible cultural heritage family’ this year.

In the coming days, you will be discussing important issues regarding implementation of the Convention. As you know, the Committee has substantial responsibility in this area. Its decisions have a direct impact on the way in which intangible cultural heritage is safeguarded not only within communities but also at national and international levels. I would equally like to emphasize that each State Party has a duty to implement this Convention at the national level and to actively participate in international cooperation efforts.

I am sure you would no doubt agree with me in saying that the work of the Committee and efforts of States Parties cannot take place in isolation from the evolving scope of the UN’s development policy framework and particular world events that have been recently unfolding.

Culture has now been integrated in the international development policy framework with the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The achievement of this milestone is largely thanks to UNESCO’s advocacy efforts and we should all be proud of this accomplishment.

Uncontestably, culture and sustainability are intrinsically linked. Living heritage practices do need to be safeguarded not only as important identity markers for communities throughout the world but as invaluable sources of knowledge that stem generations.

Our task is to demonstrate the role of intangible cultural heritage in realizing inclusive social and economic development and environmental sustainability, as well as peace and security. It is more than timely, therefore, that this session of the Committee will examine the amendment of the Operational Directives on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development.

I would like to assure you that efforts to highlight the role of intangible cultural heritage are being pursued by UNESCO in a holistic and transversal manner. A case in point is UNESCO’s participation in the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development planned for 2016 that focuses on policy frameworks for sustainable urban development strategies, which include cultural heritage safeguarding in communities in different contexts to help stimulate local development, creativity and employment.

On a less positive note, I cannot continue without speaking about the terrifying destruction of cultural heritage in the Middle East that we are being forced to observe almost on a daily basis. Behind the devastating demolition of sites, monuments and artefacts that have been reduced to rubble, these barbaric acts also extend to intangible cultural heritage – the viability of living heritage practices of local communities are being threatened.

As the Intangible Heritage Convention affirms, living heritage cannot be disconnected from the communities that serve as its bearers and practitioners. Ongoing events have reiterated the need for protection of bearers so that traditions and customs can continue to be transmitted to younger generations. It also means that those no longer living in their communities need to have the same support through appropriate channels.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In closing, while safeguarding intangible cultural heritage is facing challenges, positive advancements are taking place. As a collective, we need to continue to look at tools we have at our disposal and processes we can put in place to implement the 2003 Convention so we can all continue to enjoy the benefits of the world’s living heritage.

Thank you for your kind attention and may deliberations over the next few days be fruitful.