**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**

**The Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention: its first decade**

*The conference is held under the patronage of the Chinese Ministry of Culture, Sichuan Provincial People’s Government, Chinese National Commission for UNESCO and UNESCO, and is organized by the Chengdu Municipal People’s Government, China National Centre for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, Sichuan Provincial Department of Culture, International Training Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region (CRIHAP) and UNESCO Section for Intangible Cultural Heritage within the Culture Sector at Headquarters. It takes place in conjunction with the Fourth International Festival of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Chengdu.*

**Background**

Every convention is a product of its time and its surroundings. It reflects the priorities of the international community at the time of its adoption, in terms of values, science and politics. Yet it also has the possibility to influence, even transform, global understandings and to determine priorities for the future. This is all the more true of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which looks resolutely forward in its commitment to ensuring that coming generations will continue to have the possibility to practise the cultural expressions that we enjoy today.

Although it was drafted over a period of barely two years, the 2003 Convention built upon almost sixty years of concern by UNESCO with protection of heritage in general, and resulted from three decades of reflection on living traditions in particular. Early landmarks such as the Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), the UNESCO/WIPO Model provisions for national laws on the protection of expressions of folklore against illicit exploitation and other prejudicial actions (1985), the Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore (1989) and the programme of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity (1997) created reactions, discussions and knowledge that ultimately led to the 2003 Convention.

Ten years have passed since the adoption of the 2003 Convention, including seven years of actual implementation at the international level. At the conference we look back on that decade in order to reflect on the Convention’s function, role and value while also looking forward to its future.

**Goal and Target Audience**

The goal of the conference is to reflect profoundly on the life of the 2003 Convention so far, providing a strategic opportunity to recall the intentions of the framers of the 2003 Convention, to identify its achievements thus far and to define priorities for the future.

Scientific and legal experts and States Parties officials who took part actively in the preparation of the 2003 Convention are the key participants. Additionally, experts from State Parties, institutions working with intangible cultural heritage and stakeholders of living traditions in general are important participants of the conference. Participants take part in the conference in their personal capacities.

**Programme and format**

The conference features a series of plenary round-table panels, each moderated by a person with deep knowledge of the Convention’s history. Panellists do not present formal lectures but are instead asked to engage in a lively discussion and debate, drawing upon their own personal experience and deep knowledge of the panel’s topic. Ample time is foreseen in each panel for questions and comments from audience members.

The series of round-tables proceeds through a sequence of topics that build progressively and chronologically from an initial retrospective session to a final prospective one. The intervening sessions look backward and forward at the same time, focussing particularly on the challenges facing the Convention today.

**Round-table 1: Achievements of the Convention: changing the discourse of ICH and implanting new concepts**

During the preparation of the Convention, experts discussed the meaning and understanding of several key terms in order to create an internationally viable vocabulary for the Convention. As a parallel to this exercise, a more profound understanding of the core of intangible cultural heritage was also established, requiring, for many, a fundamentally different way of thinking and acting than had previously prevailed.

One example is the discussions over decades leading ultimately to the term ‘intangible cultural heritage’. The terms ‘traditional culture’ and ‘customs’ had provoked misunderstandings and difficulties and the term ‘folklore’ was perceived as having negative connotations of pastoralism, colonialism and domination. ‘Folklore’ was typically constituted or identified by persons other than its bearers, while ‘intangible cultural heritage’ signified self-empowerment, reserving the right to define their heritage to the cultural creators and bearers themselves. Another example relates to the discussions leading to the term ‘safeguarding’ instead of ‘protection’. The understanding of this term required other notions of the dynamism of cultural expressions and the necessity of ensuring their viability, emphasizing a procedural approach, including the cultural creators and bearers as active parts of the process. ‘Safeguarding’ embraces a broader and more holistic understanding, changing the focus from products and manifestations to processes and people, and is in strong contrast to static or defensive notions of ‘protection’ and ‘preservation’ coloured by an objectified view on culture and with strong paternalistic connotations.

How has the creation of the 2003 Convention transformed global understandings of intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding? How do the new terminology and definitions demand a fundamental reconceptualization of the relations between intangible cultural heritage and its bearers? Looking back over the Convention’s first decade, what has been the global impact of its new concepts and orientations? How have its concepts influenced subsequent human rights instruments and contributed to the international development agenda? Conversely, have there been developments in international law or policy that cause us to read the Convention differently and understand its key concepts through a different prism?

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

The first Bolivian proposals of 1973 concerning international measures for the ‘protection of the folk arts and cultural heritage of the various nations of the world’ already called for the establishment of an ‘International Register of Folkloristic Cultural Property’. Through the three decades of study and discussion that resulted in the 2003 Convention, the advantages and disadvantages of different systems of registering, cataloguing, listing and inventorying were debated at length. Grounded both in the preceding centuries of folklorists’ efforts to collect and catalogue the expressions of oral heritage and in the model of listing that was established under the 1972 Convention, the impulse to create an international system of registration was a powerful one, despite numerous cautions and critiques that were expressed along the way.

Looking back, one would like to ask, which advantages of international listing stood out compellingly enough to override the predicted pitfalls? And what are the advantages of listing seen from today’s perspective? Are there any new problems with the international listing mechanisms that had not already been fully anticipated by those sceptical of their value in 2003 or earlier? With regard to inventorying at the national level, what methods and approaches can help it to escape its roots in the 18th-century encyclopaedist approach and 19th-century folklore studies and fully contribute to safeguarding in the spirit of the Convention? Round-table participants include both those who cautioned against the listing mechanism and those who can explain how it has been successfully integrated at the national level into broader safeguarding strategies and has contributed to increased visibility of living heritage and to expanded understanding of its character and scope.

The round-table might also include a creative exercise of imagining an alternative, counterfactual history in which the Convention were adopted without international lists – what could we point to ten years later as its achievements? Or another history in which the lack of international lists made it impossible for the Convention to be adopted or find wide support: would the world be better off or worse off?

**Round-table 3: Parallel universes: intellectual property, world heritage and cultural goods and services**

Even though questions concerning intellectual property rights have been an important part of UNESCO’s discussions on conservation of culture since the early 1950s, the 2003 Convention specifically excludes intellectual property from its scope. Already during the 1970s some experts doubted that it was possible in a single instrument both to protect intellectual property and to ensure viability of living traditions, and during the preparation of the 2003 Convention, despite productive cooperation between UNESCO and WIPO over the decades, it was decided to focus on safeguarding. What has been the parallel progress on the IP side, since 2003, under WIPO’s auspices? At the national level, how are Member States integrating the safeguarding perspective of the 2003 Convention and the IP protection perspective? What if one imagined an alternative history in which the Convention had also encompassed IP protections – what would its first decade look like?

Similarly, the 1972 Convention has continued to thrive during the first decade of the 2003 Convention. The 1972 Convention has been in a sense the older sibling, serving both as inspiration and model but also as a rhetorical foil against which the younger sibling rebelled. Since 2003, however, the concepts and orientations of the ICH Convention have also influenced the practices of tangible heritage protection. For instance, in 2012 the 40th anniversary of the 1972 Convention was celebrated under the theme ‘World Heritage and Sustainable Development: the Role of Local Communities’. Reports from last year’s celebrations, such as the Kyoto Vision, show that work with World Heritage, to a much larger extent than before, will seek to achieve an effective involvement of local communities. In what ways have the concepts and orientations of the 2003 Convention influenced recent developments and evolution of the 1972 Convention? To what extent may there still be resistance to the younger sibling from the ‘real’ heritage community?

The third parallel domain of action is that of cultural goods and services, as covered by the 2005 Convention. The emphasis that the 2003 Convention places on the dynamic nature of intangible cultural heritage and its continuous transmission and re-creation is echoed by the concerns of the 2005 Convention with promoting favourable conditions for cultural creativity. Moreover, there are many cultural expressions that can be considered both as intangible cultural heritage and as cultural goods and services, even if the domains of action of the two Conventions are different and they would approach the same expression from different perspectives. Some States have ratified both conventions and seek to integrate them side by side in their policies and programmes; other States have cast their lot with one while rejecting the other; a few States have rejected both. In what ways are States balancing the sometimes complementary and sometimes contrasting scopes and purposes of the two instruments?

**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 also been differently defined and developed in different States. Some have started with awareness-raising and information campaigns; others, by focusing directly on national inventories and other safeguarding efforts. Yet others have plunged immediately into nominations for the international lists. What are the safeguarding experiences of the States Parties? Are there some they would highlight as successful and other things that they would have done differently? How has the Convention contributed on the national level to developing best practices and new legislative approaches and institutional structures?

The Convention has also provided an opportunity for States to cooperate at an international level, bringing their own national experience to benefit other countries and learning from them through taking part in the Convention’s international mechanisms. How do States view their experiences in relation to those of other States? This session offers an occasion for representatives of selected States 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.

**Round-table 5: Open questions and future directions**

Looking towards the future, what will the Convention’s second and third decades look like? What are the pitfalls that should be avoided? And what are the opportunities and avenues that ought to be pursued in greater depth than has been possible thus far? These overall subjects might be addressed through different questions:

How can the close relation between intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development be more effectively highlighted and strengthened in the future? What is the place of intangible cultural heritage in mitigating the effects of climate change, for instance by offering time-tested methods of environmental adaptation or community-based institutions for mediating questions of access to resources that may become increasingly scarce? What are the implications for the Convention of recent developments in international human rights such as the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? How have concerns with gender equality and gender diversity figured into implementation of the Convention to date and how might they be integrated more centrally in the future? How can intangible cultural heritage play an even more important role in conflict avoidance, conflict resolution and peace-making, and in the prevention of and recovery from natural disasters, than it has done so far? What is the place of languages in the 2003 Convention and how can the Convention contribute to the promotion and safeguarding of linguistic diversity, even if that is not explicitly its goal?

And finally: What are the questions yet to be asked in order to ensure that the 2003 Convention continues to move in the right direction, realize most effectively the hopes of its framers and justify the confidence that has been placed in it by the people of the world?

**Outcomes**

A closing session during the conference includes a brief oral report from a rapporteur summarizing the main trends of the discussions, and they will subsequently be included in a written report to be completed in the months following its conclusion. In addition, a set of recommendations can be addressed by the conference participants to the Director-General, focussing in particular on the work to be accomplished by UNESCO and its Member States in the coming decade.