

Address

by

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Assistant Director-General for Culture**

**on the occasion of the first extraordinary session of the Intergovernmental
Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

**Wednesday 23 May 2007, 11 a.m.
Chengdu, China**

Mr Minister of Culture of the People's Republic of China,
Mr Governor of Sichuan Province,
Mr Vice Minister of Culture of the People's Republic of China,
Mr Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO, Vice Minister of Education of the People's Republic of China,
Mr Mayor of Chengdu,
Distinguished Representatives of the States Members of the Intergovernmental Committee and of the States Parties to the Convention,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a very great pleasure for me to be here with you today, for the first extraordinary session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

The magnificent performance that we have just seen as part of the opening ceremony of the International Festival of Intangible Cultural Heritage, organized by the Chinese authorities and presented before a prestigious gathering, bears witness to the great cultural wealth of China and the world. I should like, first of all, to thank the Chinese authorities for the warm welcome extended to us and for their sterling efforts in holding this extraordinary session.

By being held here, this session serves as a vibrant tribute to China, which has long been one of the most active countries on the international scene in safeguarding and promoting this living but extremely fragile heritage. The interest and concern that it has shown have been honoured through the proclamation of four traditional expressions as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, namely the Kun Qu Opera (in 2001), the Guqin and its music (in 2003), the Uyghur Muqam of Xinjiang (in 2005) and the Urtiin Duu – Folk Long Song (in 2005), which was submitted jointly with Mongolia.

I am particularly pleased that the Chairman of the Executive Board, Mr Zhang Xinsheng, who only very recently brilliantly guided the work of our Organization's Executive Board at its 176th session in Paris, is here with us in his native land.

I should like to extend a warm welcome to the twenty-four members of the Intergovernmental Committee who are meeting for the second time, in today's extraordinary session, in order to move forward the implementation of the Convention. I also extend greetings to the representatives of the

other States Parties to the Convention, the observers of States that have not yet ratified the Convention and non-governmental organizations. I wish you every success in the next five days of intense, but assuredly fascinating, work.

As you know, the Director-General of UNESCO attaches great importance to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the participation of communities in the revitalization and transmission of the intangible heritage, which is highly prized for the sense of identity and continuity that it imparts. He therefore considers the 2003 Convention to be a pivot between the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

The role played by the heritage in sustainable development that is attentive to both the present and the future of the planet and in improving mutual understanding worldwide is now recognized by all. UNESCO ideals are the achievement of development with a human face and the building of peace for all, hence the need to approach these three Conventions with a sense of their complementarities in mind.

There is now a comprehensive standard-setting framework of seven international conventions within which the international community may take action in the field of culture. Three of these conventions specifically constitute the pillars on which the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity rest. I can only commend the commitment of the States that have already ratified the 2003 Convention and invite States that have not yet done so to come and join them. It is for the representatives of the international community to put the conventions into practice in real life, ascribe to them the full scope and significance that they deserve and ensure that they are as effective as we expect them to be.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We have come a great distance since the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage came into force in April 2006, and we have seen important achievements. The General Assembly of the States Parties met twice in 2006, first in ordinary session, then in extraordinary session. It adopted its Rules of Procedure and elected the 24 States Members of the Intergovernmental Committee. The Committee in turn adopted its own Rules of Procedure at its first ordinary session in Algiers and began to draft the texts required for the implementation of the Convention. In view of the wide-ranging work entailed in drafting the operational directives, you wisely scheduled an additional session this year in order to complete the work, the results of which must be approved by the General Assembly of the States Parties.

During the present session, once you have elected the members of the Bureau of the first extraordinary session, adopted the agenda and approved the admission of the observers that have requested accreditation in writing, you will continue the discussion initiated in Algiers on the operational directives for the implementation of the Convention.

At the first ordinary session in Algiers, the Committee requested that comments and suggestions on the drafting of documents relating to the implementation of the Convention, advisory assistance and the lists provided for by the Convention, be submitted to it for consideration. Thirty-two States Parties to the Convention have sent their contributions, which are available in full at the Culture portal of our Internet site and have been summarized in an information document that has been distributed here. Moreover, your comments were all taken into account when the working documents were drawn up for the session.

Your work will bear specifically on the nature of the Lists mentioned in the Convention and the selection criteria for inscription on the two Lists: the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in need of Urgent Safeguarding and the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. You will remember that a number of procedural matters concerning these lists were

raised at the first session in Algiers and in the written notes received afterwards by the States Parties. You may therefore consider it desirable to explore the specificity of each list and the relationship between the two lists in greater depth before deciding on the criteria for inscription, in particular in the light of the discussions held on the subject at the meeting of experts held in New Delhi last April, on the generous initiative of India. The report on that meeting has been included in the documents that have been distributed here in Chengdu.

You will then be asked to examine the question of the incorporation of the ninety Masterpieces of Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity proclaimed in 2001, 2003 and 2005 into the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

As you know, one of the goals of the 2003 Convention is to make local, national and international actors and the general public aware of the importance of intangible cultural heritage. The Secretariat has therefore drawn up a working document on the possibility of devising an emblem for the Convention in order to raise its profile.

Lastly, a decision should be taken on the financial regulations of the Fund for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, established by the Convention to assist States Parties in their safeguarding efforts, to which many States have already contributed.

With regard to advisory assistance, following the discussions begun in Algiers, the Secretariat has drawn up a document on the criteria for the accreditation of NGOs and on the role they would play. Information has been provided to you on the advantages of establishing an umbrella or coordinating body.

The provisional agenda contains an item relating to Article 18 of the Convention, which requires the Committee periodically to select and promote national, subregional or regional heritage safeguarding programmes, projects and activities that would best reflect the principles and goals of the Convention. Another working document has been submitted to you on the subject.

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Assuredly, you are required to achieve a great deal in five days. Demands will be made on your skills and commitment for long periods. If the work begun in Algiers and pursued here in China is completed in Japan at the second ordinary session, which will be held early in September, the General Assembly will be able to approve, perhaps at an extraordinary session, all the provisions required. Consideration could then be given to the first inscription being made in autumn 2008 at the third ordinary session of the Committee.

We have some long days ahead of us. I shall not therefore delay the inception of your work any longer. I sincerely hope that the proceedings will be marked by a spirit of wisdom and perceptiveness for a heritage for which we hold responsibility on behalf of all humanity.

Thank you.