

**Opening Note by the Director of the
UNESCO Dar es Salaam Cluster Office
Cheikh Tidiane SY**

27 November 2006, Golden Tulip, Dar es Salaam
United Republic of Tanzania

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Honorable Minister,

Dear participants,

Dear Colleagues from UNESCO offices in the sub-region,

It is an honor and a pleasure for me to welcome you here to Dar es Salaam for this sub-regional meeting entitled "The Convention for the Safeguarding the Intangible Cultural Heritage: implementation and inventory making". We are privileged to have participants from some 23 countries from Eastern and Southern Africa, and who are all professionally involved with the process of making inventories of intangible cultural heritage in their respective countries.

The meeting is intended to be an information session to share with you all the development of the operational life of the 2003 Convention as well as to provide a forum to exchange experiences with others working in the field of intangible heritage.

I sincerely hope that beyond the information sharing, the meeting can help to foster fruitful relationships and networks to assist you all in your future work in the field of intangible cultural heritage, and in particular the tricky issue of making inventories.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you are no doubt aware, the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage was adopted in October 2003 by the 32nd General Conference of UNESCO. For the Convention to enter into force it required ratification by 30 states, which happened on January 20th of this year. Since then, another 38 Member States have ratified so that today 68 countries are State Parties to the Convention, of which 15 are from Africa. This is a very fast ratification process so far, in fact the fastest in UNESCO's history, which testifies to the importance of the question to the world at large.

Indeed, I need not remind you who are professionals in the field, that we are at an era of unprecedented social and cultural change, and that faced with the enormous challenges and opportunities that such social transformations entail, we must make the effort to take special care of the vast diversity of cultural expressions that are in danger of being submerged by the rapid change in lifestyles around the world. In Africa we know that many of the things our grandparents knew are lost to us, and so will be forever lost to future generations. We also know that many of our songs, our sayings, our theatre, our

art forms our ceremonies could well disappear within a generation, or in some cases even sooner. Furthermore, the broadening of the international community's definition of cultural heritage, through the Convention, is an opportunity for the African continent to be duly recognized for its cultural contribution to the world, in particular in music and art.

So what does the convention do? The Convention offers concrete opportunities to safeguard the heritage and State-parties to the Convention can benefit in a number of ways:

The activities under the Convention will serve to build capacity internationally in the field of Intangible Heritage, by building on the accumulated knowledge and practice in the field of intangible heritage globally, through information sharing, best practices, formal networks and so on.

The convention serves a framework for dialogue and cooperation between different practitioners and heritage experts from different countries. Indeed the intangible cultural heritage often transcends national borders: the famous Makonde Sculptures which you might see in the south of Tanzania also 'belong' to Mozambique, The Maasai ceremonies in the north cross into Kenya, and Zanzibaris share with our friends from the Comoros what is sometimes called the 'Dhow culture'- Dhow being the traditional Swahili sailing vessels you might also see around Dar es Salaam if you have the opportunity.

Of course, this situation is far from being unique to Tanzania, and is more often than not the case when we consider for example African languages. All of this highlights the need for setting out international frameworks to facilitate cooperation between countries for the safeguarding of intangible heritage.

Finally, the convention also establishes an international fund for the safeguarding of Intangible heritage. The fund, based on the model of the world heritage fund, will be directed towards helping developing countries to safeguard intangible heritage of particular value or in serious danger of disappearing, and will be accessible by those States who are party to the Convention.

Honorable Minister, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I will not dwell further on the Convention since that will be the focus of your work over the next two days, unless it is to encourage you to work with your leaders to encourage them to ratify. I wish you all a good meeting and hope you also get some time to enjoy Dar es Salaam. It is now my pleasure and my honor to give the floor to our official Guest of Honor so that he may open the meeting. The Honorable (M...) Saif Khatib, Minister of Information, Culture and Sports of the United Republic of Tanzania.