**CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE   
INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE  
SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**Twelfth session**

**Jeju Island, Republic of Korea**

**4 to 9 December 2017**

**Item 15 of the Provisional Agenda:**

**Intangible cultural heritage in emergencies**

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| **Summary**  At its eleventh session, the Committee encouraged the Secretariat to enhance gathering knowledge and gaining experience on the role of communities in both safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage at risk in emergencies and mobilizing it as a tool for preparedness, resilience, reconciliation and recovery ([Decision 11.COM 15](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/11.COM/15)). The present document presents the results of the activities carried out to date by the Secretariat in this regard.  **Decision required:** paragraph 26 |

1. **Introduction**
2. At its eleventh session, the Committee discussed an item dedicated to intangible cultural heritage in emergencies for the first time and decided to continue addressing this issue at the present session, with a view to exploring more operational modalities for the implementation of the principles of the 2003 Convention in situations of emergencies ([Decision 11.COM 15](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/11.COM/15)).
3. The Committee recognized the dual nature of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies both as being under threat and as a powerful tool for resilience and recovery, but felt that more field studies were needed to fully appreciate the complexity of the issue. The Secretariat was encouraged ‘to enhance gathering knowledge and gaining experience on the role of communities in both safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage at risk in emergencies and mobilizing it as a tool for preparedness, resilience, reconciliation and recovery and to present examples of such mobilization to its coming session’.
4. In order to respond to the encouragement of the Committee, the Secretariat investigated the implementation of the Convention in emergencies by pursuing work on several fronts. These activities were undertaken in the framework of the *Strategy for reinforcing UNESCO’s action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict* ([38 C/Resolution 48](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002433/243325e.pdf)) and its Action Plan, as well as in view of the [Addendum to the Strategy concerning emergencies associated with disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002527/252788e.pdf). This document presents the main activities carried out by the Secretariat, followed by an overview of the key findings, including lessons learnt from the experience thus far with the emergency International Assistance mechanism, as well as possible ways forward.
5. **Main activities carried out**
6. Keeping in mind the central role that the 2003 Convention gives to communities, a small-scale survey was conducted on an experimental basis in 2016, funded by the UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund. This activity was aimed at gaining a better understanding of the changing role and function of the intangible cultural heritage of displaced Syrians, its potential for resilience and the ways in which communities try to transmit their intangible cultural heritage to ensure its safeguarding. Interviews were carried out with a sample of some sixty people; the majority of these individuals were displaced Syrians located in Jordan and Lebanon, and some others were displaced and expatriates based in Egypt, France, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey, as well as members of the host community in Jordan. An overview of the key findings is provided under section III of this document and the full report is available [here](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/38275-EN.pdf).
7. Following that experience, the Secretariat launched a community-based needs identification for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in Nord-Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, in 2017 (see [project page](https://ich.unesco.org/en/projects/community-based-needs-identification-for-the-safeguarding-of-intangible-cultural-heritage-in-nord-kivu-00378)). Funded by the UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund, the aim of this activity is to assess the specific needs for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in the context of the long-standing conflict and large-scale internal displacements of populations, currently estimated at one million people. At the time of writing, the [preliminary desk study](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/RDC-201709-document_de_r%C3%A9f%C3%A9rence_Nord_Kivu.pdf) and the awareness-raising and consultation workshop with resource stakeholders have been carried out. The field survey within the target communities, followed by the analysis of the information collected, will take place between October and December 2017. Although specific findings are not yet available at the time of writing, it is worth reporting that the initial implementation of the activity was received very positively by local stakeholders, who appreciated the fact that they were consulted in relation to the preparation of the activity and that ready-made identification of elements and safeguarding plans about intangible cultural heritage at risk were not used.
8. Furthermore, intersectoral cooperation was initiated with the Education Sector on the prevention of violent extremism in the framework of the intersectoral meeting on integrating intangible cultural heritage into education, which was held at the UNESCO Headquarters in May 2017, in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 4.7. This meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on the benefits of integrating intangible cultural heritage into education for preventing violent extremism.
9. Regarding disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards, considering the unpredictability of such emergencies, the Secretariat decided to conduct a desk study in order to identify and conceptualize the key issues at stake. The purpose of the study was to take stock of the current state of knowledge regarding the impact of disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards on intangible cultural heritage, as well as the role that living heritage could play in mitigating the impact of such disasters on local communities. This study reviewed the available literature, identified case studies, mostly from the Pacific, and came up with a set of recommendations regarding the safeguarding and mobilization of intangible cultural heritage in the context of natural hazards (see [full report](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/Desk_study-ICH_and_disasters-2017.pdf)). This activity was funded by the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund under the line dedicated to ‘Other functions’, as per the approved spending plan. The Secretariat also contributed to a number of Post-Disaster Needs Assessments (PDNAs) launched at the country level following recent natural disasters, in particular in Haiti, Peru and, more recently, Antigua and Barbuda, and Dominica.
10. In relation to emergency International Assistance, the Secretariat has continued to provide dedicated support for the preparation and implementation of such requests. One major achievement came with the completion of the first emergency assistance allocations granted in the framework of the Convention, i.e. the three-year project in [Mali](https://ich.unesco.org/en/assistances/inventory-of-intangible-cultural-heritage-in-mali-with-a-view-to-its-urgent-safeguarding-01026), implemented following attacks from armed groups and extremists, as well as the project conducted in [Vanuatu](https://ich.unesco.org/en/assistances/safeguarding-indigenous-vernacular-architecture-and-building-knowledge-in-vanuatu-01214) following the category 5 Cyclone Pam. The implementation of the [emergency assistance granted to Côte d’Ivoire in 2015](https://ich.unesco.org/en/assistances/inventory-of-the-intangible-cultural-heritage-present-in-cote-d-ivoire-in-view-of-its-urgent-safeguarding-01051) has also been closely monitored (see the report concerning these three requests in document [ITH/17/12.COM/8.a](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-17-12.COM-8.a-EN.docx)). Technical assistance was provided to Ecuador (which then decided to withdraw its request) following the earthquake in 2016, as well as to Niger (subsequently approved by the Bureau of the Intergovernmental Committee on 3 October as per [Decision 12.COM 4.BUR 4](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-17-12.COM_4.BUR-Decisions-EN.docx)), with a focus on revitalizing and mobilizing intangible cultural heritage practices as a means of achieving increased resilience and dialogue between displaced populations and host communities in the context of conflict related to violent extremism.
11. **Overview of key findings**

***Situations of conflict and violent extremism***

1. The aforementioned interviews carried out amongst displaced Syrians highlighted that most of the cultural expressions, customs, skills and know-how that make up the intangible cultural heritage of communities, groups and individuals in Syria have been affected by the conflict since 2011. Cultural practices such as food preparation and the provision of hospitality have been seriously affected by the shortage of supplies and funds and diminished trust beyond restricted circles. The general atmosphere of war, death and mourning changes the way in which religious and social events are celebrated. Traditional health care and funeral services are in high demand, but many practitioners have died, been displaced or cannot provide their services due to insecure conditions. Together with social or religious institutions, individuals that transmit the cultural memory and identity of groups can no longer perform their roles since cultural spaces have been destroyed and group members dispersed. With many artisans having left the country because of the conflict, the transmission of craft skills as well as the production and marketing chains of handcrafted products have been severely affected. For the performing artists, the channels of enactment and transmission have been disrupted by death and destruction, the breakdown of social networks and widespread displacement.
2. The testimonies also showed that displaced Syrians use intangible cultural heritage as a resource for psychological, social and economic resilience. For example, Syrian corpse washers in Lebanon and Jordan are increasingly called upon to perform mourning rituals, thus providing a sense of continuity in practices and spiritual beliefs that may ease the trauma associated with loss and burial in a foreign land. Another example relates to traditional food, which was also often mentioned as helping displaced Syrians to go through the arduous experience of displacement by providing a taste of home. In the same vein, the performing arts help when people are confronted with the hardships of exile, by giving refugees a familiar sense of bearings. Moreover, these forms of intangible cultural heritage provide displaced communities with resources, allowing them to recover lost livelihoods even in the absence of economic means, as testified to by all the Syrian musicians interviewed in France, Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey, who derive an income from practising their art, albeit to various degrees.
3. The analysis of the information collected clearly revealed that for displaced Syrians, the practice, enjoyment and transmission of intangible cultural heritage is essential for preserving a collective identity and social cohesion during displacement. As such, despite the hardships of displacement, Syrians strive to maintain their intangible cultural heritage through new channels of enactment and transmission, sometimes thanks to catalysts such as NGOs and social media. This also demonstrates the adaptive and evolving nature of intangible cultural heritage.
4. The survey also provides interesting examples of how, in some cases, intangible cultural heritage serves to create a bridge between displaced Syrians and their host communities. One such example is the use of story-telling and Syrian songs in Jordanian and Lebanese schools welcoming Syrian children, which fosters intercultural communication and integration. Syrian musicians performing at festivals and participating in encounters with artists from the host society open up a dialogue and mutual understanding through shared values. The practice of a traditional dance enacted both amongst Syrians and Jordanians highlighted the importance of shared heritage for the development of friendship and respect between Syrians and members of host communities. Syrian artisans teach their skills to local craftspersons, and gain esteem and integration through their know-how. This demonstrates how intangible cultural heritage can also help manage and overcome conflict and tensions between displaced persons and with members of their host societies through a shared core of cultural practices, attitudes and beliefs that allows for interactions beyond ethno-religious differences exacerbated by the war.
5. Regrettably, humanitarian organizations have not fully integrate culture into their assessments of the effects of the conflict and of the needs of refugees and displaced persons. While certain cultural aspects are taken into account in some of their actions, the broader concept of intangible cultural heritage is generally absent in interventions by humanitarian actors. For example, research conducted using documents produced by the UNHCR and its humanitarian partners on the Syria Regional Refugee Response showed that culture is mainly considered in terms of cultural norms and behavior within the framework of psycho-social interventions focused on mental health, early marriage or sexual and gender-based violence.
6. The 2003 Convention acknowledges the contribution that intangible cultural heritage makes to fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies, which are based on a respect for human rights and free from fear and violence (paragraph 192 of the Operational Directives). Through a highly participatory community-based inventory of 211 elements of intangible cultural heritage in regions that were occupied by armed groups and extremists, the emergency International Assistance project implemented in Mali showed that it is important for young people to understand the social, cultural and symbolic value of cultural practices so that they can enjoy their right to learn, participate in those practices and transmit them to the next generations. In this sense, intangible cultural heritage could also play an important role in the prevention of violent extremism. The emergency International Assistance request submitted by Niger is another good example in this regard, as the project aims to promote and disseminate common values through shared intangible cultural heritage among different communities, thus contributing to combatting radicalization and ideologies of hate disseminated by extremist groups such as Boko Haram, which deliberately target cultural values.

***Situations of disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards***

1. Regarding natural disasters, the desk study highlights that while local, traditional or indigenous knowledge is recognized in the disaster field as a critical tool for disaster risk reduction strategies to directly increase resilience and reduce vulnerability, there is a limited understanding of and elaboration on the broader concept of intangible cultural heritage and the risks and opportunities related to its practice and transmission in such emergency situations. This being said, there are some interesting case studies that illustrate that intangible cultural heritage plays a crucial mitigating role at every step of the disaster management cycle, from preparedness through response to recovery. These studies also illustrate the importance of intangible cultural heritage in maintaining cultural knowledge or links within and beyond communities, and the risks of not having or maintaining these traditions or networks.

* For example, in the New Guinea highlands, repeated famines caused by frost and drought have given rise to oral traditions and networks of support maintained over successive generations, thus establishing food security strategies to cope with destructive events. This case study demonstrates how preparatory measures have evolved over the centuries and are embedded within cultural practices that enhance the resilience of communities.
* Other cases show that the lack of transmission of intangible cultural heritage relating to preparedness strategies can have a negative effect. This was the case with the severe tsunami that hit Papua New Guinea in 1998, where the transmission of knowledge and awareness about safe settlement options has been lost over time.
* Some other examples have shown how communities draw on their intangible cultural heritage as an immediate response to a disaster to protect their lives and meet their livelihood needs. A case in point is a major seismic event in 2007 in the Solomon Islands, which prompted an immediate self-evacuation by hundreds of people to raised inland areas. Subsequent studies showed that a disproportionate number of those who lost their lives were immigrants that were not familiar enough with the intangible cultural heritage related to the early warning signs generated by the earthquake.
* Intangible cultural heritage has also shown itself to be important in the recovery process as a repository of cultural beliefs and values. It can foster resilience, leading to proactive recovery and enhanced community cohesion, as is demonstrated in paragraph 10, albeit in a different type of emergency. After the Samoan Tsunami of 2009, the concept of hospitality in combination with the *āiga* (the extended family unit) in the Samoan way of life (*fa’a Sāmoa*) provided a powerful social and familial network for sharing and maximizing resources.

1. The desk study further highlighted the need to consider disaster-related threats when assessing the viability of intangible cultural heritage. At the same time, it is argued that, where appropriate, the disaster risk management perspective should be incorporated into safeguarding measures. This interconnection between disaster risk management and safeguarding measures needs to be further nurtured. The desk study also illustrate a related point: namely, it is not an easy task to identify the effects of a disaster on the viability of intangible cultural heritage in isolation from the broader cultural and socio-economic threats. In the same vein, disaster threats are rarely considered in most intangible cultural heritage baseline documentation. For instance, a review of elements on the Representative List and the Urgent Safeguarding List indicates a lack of information regarding the impacts of natural hazards on the practice and transmission of intangible cultural heritage, even for countries that are considered as highly vulnerable to natural hazards. This should not be taken to imply that disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards do not pose a significant threat to intangible cultural heritage, but rather that these impacts have not been sufficiently considered or investigated, notably in the context of inventories.
2. At the operational level, the assessment of damages related to intangible cultural heritage is part of the Post-Disaster Needs Assessment (PDNA) that is carried out by the United Nations System with the national authorities in the weeks immediately following a disaster to document the damages and loss and plan and cost the recovery process. Thus far, experiences with PDNAs carried out in the Pacific between 2012 and 2016, in Nepal in 2015 and in Haiti and Peru in 2016 have showed that the assessment and costing focused primarily on the material aspects of intangible cultural heritage. Such aspects include the damaged or destroyed fabric of the buildings, structures, performance venues, resources and objects that provide the spaces or material means for the production and performance of intangible cultural heritage, as well as the physical movement or displacement of communities and intangible cultural heritage bearers. This is due on one hand to the short time frames over which PDNAs are conducted, which do not allow for comprehensive background research into individual intangible cultural elements and for proper community-based participation, and on the other to the focus on calculating damages and losses in monetary terms. Nevertheless, PDNAs can provide a good basis for launching a community-based needs identification during a second stage, for example by assessing the affected communities who will be involved.

***Lessons learnt from the emergency International Assistance mechanism***

1. The low number of requests for emergency International Assistance is regrettable, in particular in the field of disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards. This tendency might be linked to the insufficient consideration of intangible cultural heritage as a priority area of intervention in such situations, as well as to the lack of pilot projects implemented so far that can be drawn on as sources of inspiration. However, as UNESCO is now gaining knowledge and experience in this field and is gradually defining operational actions to respond to situations of emergency, an increase in emergency requests is expected in the future.
2. Technical assistance, which was provided to almost all of the above-mentioned cases, proves efficient in supporting the submitting State to define a specific response to the emergency context, in line with paragraph 50 and Chapter VI of the [Operational Directives](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-Operational_Directives-6.GA-PDF-EN.pdf), and in allowing experiences of similar situations to be shared. For instance, the technical assistance granted to Niger was provided by a Malian expert, with support from the Secretariat. This took place in an excellent collaborative spirit that fostered common reflections and the sharing of experiences, with a view to designing activities that respond to the specific context of internal and external displacement.
3. Emergency International Assistance is a useful mechanism for acting in short timeframes while responding to the requirement for community involvement under the 2003 Convention. It was not set up as a rapid-response mechanism deployable at short notice, but the UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund established by the Culture Sector provides a good complementary possibility in this regard. Moreover, considering both the difficulty of identifying needs and the evolving nature of some emergency situations, a phase-to phase approach is required, starting with a community-based needs identification.
4. **Possible ways forward**
5. The knowledge and experiences gained by the Secretariat, even during the short period since the last session, could confirm the understanding of the Committee that intangible cultural heritage can play a fundamental role in emergencies. The cases studied in the present document are limited in scope since they only cover selected geographical areas and certain types or phases of emergencies. Unfortunately, situations of emergencies continue to take place in all corners of the world, for widely different reasons and in diverse contexts. In turn, the experiences of communities affected by emergencies are also diverse. It is important to carry out **more case studies** – based on operational activities – aimed at collecting further examples to elucidate the complex role communities play in safeguarding their living heritage at risk in emergencies and how this heritage is mobilized by such communities as a tool for preparedness, resilience, reconciliation and recovery. It is hoped that with an increased number of examples, a consolidated body of knowledge will point to emerging patterns in order to develop suitable interventions to be undertaken for different situations.
6. One lesson that can already be drawn at this stage is the **usefulness of community-based needs identifications**. They serve as a starting point when reviewing the impact a crisis has on the viability of specific traditions and practices on the one hand, and for understanding how their safeguarding can help communities surmount such crises on the other. Needs identifications typically entail background studies, stakeholder consultations, field surveys and a careful analysis of the results collected. Giving a real voice to communities, this approach requires an important preparation phase, expertise and confidence-building with those affected by crises and disasters. However, if successful, the results would be instrumental for developing context-specific safeguarding actions that respond to the concrete needs on the ground. Such an outcome cannot be hoped for when using a ready-made list of strategies prepared away from the affected areas. **Community-based needs identifications may be considered as one of the first ports of call when designing primary interventions to respond to emergency situations in the framework of the 2003 Convention**.
7. The studies mentioned in this document also clearly illustrate that the actions taken by the communities need to be supported by the national authorities. In this sense, it is essential to **guarantee an environment that allows** communities to continue to enact their living heritage. It must be reiterated that, as stipulated in Article 11 of the Convention, each State Party is obliged to safeguard the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory, which is understood to include traditions and practices at risk due to crises and disasters. In so doing, States Parties shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, in conformity with Article 15. Furthermore, communities, groups and individuals, including displaced persons, should be given **access**, to the extent possible, to the instruments, objects, artefacts, cultural and natural spaces and places of memory whose existence is necessary for expressing their intangible cultural heritage, as per the fifth point of the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage. Future interventions in emergency areas must be fully supported by the commitment of the State(s) Party(ies) concerned to recognizing the primary role of communities in safeguarding their own intangible cultural heritage and the importance of mutual respect and transparent collaboration when interacting with them. The responsibilities of the national authorities also include foreseeing crises and possible mitigation measures, for example in the form of safeguarding plans or national disaster management policies.
8. There are some **mechanisms and processes of the Convention** where improvements could be sought to support States in this endeavour. Inventorying is one such a possibility; when identifying elements of intangible cultural heritage for their inclusion in an inventory, specific mention could be made of the possible threats to the enactment and transmission of such elements that relate to conflicts or disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards. Specific efforts could also be made to highlight elements of intangible cultural heritage that contribute to conflict resolution, peace-building and disaster risk management. Periodic reporting is another mechanism through which States Parties could provide information on intangible cultural heritage in emergencies and demonstrate the effectiveness of safeguarding measures over a period of time to respond to crisis situations, if any. Last but not least, emergency International Assistance under the Fund of the Convention presents an immediate opportunity for States Parties to receive financial assistance for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergency situations.
9. Apart from the considerations described in relation to this mechanism earlier in this document, the potential of **International Assistance** lies in the possibility of generating a wealth of knowledge and experience on how to deal with intangible cultural heritage in emergencies. The reporting and monitoring of projects that have received International Assistance would need to be improved so as to understand how useful the assistance is and the changes brought about at the community level following the interventions undertaken. Thus far, experiences with International Assistance have shown that a working method involving communities, the State Party, experts and the Secretariat is most efficient in developing and implementing emergency International Assistance. In the future, more collaboration of this nature could be encouraged to respond to emergency situations in an effective manner.
10. The Committee may wish to adopt the following decision:

DRAFT DECISION 12.COM 15

The Committee,

1. Having examined document ITH/17/12.COM/15,
2. Recalling [Article 11](https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention#art11) of the Convention, [Chapters VI.3](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Directives/6.GA/VI) and [VI.4](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Directives/6.GA/VI) of the Operational Directives, as well as the fifth point of the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage,
3. Further recalling [Decision 202 EX/5.I.H](http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0025/002598/259824e.pdf) of the Executive Board,
4. Expresses its deepest solidarity with all peoples affected by emergency situations, and commends the inestimable commitment of communities, groups and individuals to safeguarding their intangible cultural heritage and ensuring its continued practice despite the challenges presented by such situations;
5. Encourages States Parties to ensurethat communities, groups and individuals, including displaced persons, have access, to the extent possible, to the instruments, objects, artefacts, cultural and natural spaces and places of memory whose existence is necessary for expressing their intangible cultural heritage;
6. Takes note of the findings resulting from the activities carried out and encourages the Secretariat to pursue its endeavours in this regard;
7. Welcomes community-based needs identifications as the initial operational modality of the Convention in emergency situations, with a view to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and mobilizing it as a tool for resilience and recovery, and requests that the Secretariat continue piloting this activity as the primary intervention to respond to emergency situations in the framework of the 2003 Convention;
8. Acknowledges the contribution of intangible cultural heritage to disaster risk management strategies and, conversely, the importance of disaster risk management strategies for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage, and underlines the need to foster the links between them;
9. Invites States Parties to therefore take into consideration threats related to disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards when assessing the viability of intangible cultural heritage, as well as to take into account the disaster risk management perspective in safeguarding measures and plans, where appropriate, and requests that the Secretariat consider integrating disaster risk management into the guidance note for inventorying intangible cultural heritage and related capacity-building training materials;
10. Encourages the Secretariat to pursue its cooperation with the Education Sector in order to harness the potential of intangible cultural heritage for the prevention of violent extremism;
11. Invites States Parties to request emergency International Assistance, as they deem appropriate, and to make use of the technical assistance mechanism with the support of the Secretariat, with a view to finalizing their requests in line with the principles of the Convention;
12. Requests that the Secretariat report to it on this issue at its next session in 2018.