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

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION**

**Eighth session**

**UNESCO Headquarters, Room I**

**8 to 10 September 2020**

**Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda:**

**Update on the reflection on the listing mechanisms of the Convention**

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| **Summary**  In 2018, the Committee decided to launch a global reflection on the listing mechanisms of the Convention to address an increasing number of issues encountered over the past decade related to the inscription of elements of intangible cultural heritage ([Decisions 13.COM 6](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/6) and [13.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/10)). The present document provides an update on the reflection process, as requested by the fourteenth session of the Committee ([Decision 14.COM 14](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/14)), in particular the plans that had to be modified as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.  **Decision required:** paragraph 9 |

1. **Background**
2. The listing system of the 2003 Convention became operational in 2009, with the first inscriptions on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding and the Register of selected programmes, projects and activities (commonly called the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices). The system was understood to serve as a major tool to help sensitize national authorities and communities around the world to the diversity and importance of living heritage, and to the need to safeguard it, as well as to mobilize international solidarity. Over the past decade of implementation, a high number of complex and inter-related issues have been identified by various stakeholders in relation to the three mechanisms.
3. The need for an overall reflection on the intent and purpose of the listing mechanisms was clearly expressed by the Committee for the first time in 2017, when it examined a request submitted by Viet Nam, to transfer an element from the Urgent Safeguarding List to the Representative List ([Decision 12.COM 14](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/12.COM/14)). On that occasion, the Committee decided to convene an open-ended intergovernmental working group to reflect on the procedures for the removal of an element from a List and the transfer from one List to the other, on the nature and purposes of the Lists and the Register established under the Convention and on the relevance of the various criteria for each of these mechanisms, amongst other issues.
4. Consequently, the Committee at its thirteenth session in 2018 launched a global reflection on the listing mechanisms to tackle these issues, supported by the Government of Japan ([Decisions 13.COM 6](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/6) and [13.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/10)). The following year, the fourteenth session of the Committee noted the timeline proposed by the Secretariat for this reflection. A preliminary category VI meeting of experts was planned for the first semester of 2020, to be followed by an open-ended intergovernmental working group in 2021; the process was to be completed by the ninth session of the General Assembly in 2022 with revisions to the Operational Directives, as necessary. It was also foreseen that the Committee and the General Assembly would receive progress reports between these meetings. Accordingly, the fourteenth session of the Committee requested that the Secretariat report to the eighth session of the General Assembly on the results of the preliminary category VI meeting of experts ([Decision 14.COM 14](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/14)).
5. In parallel, a provisional upstream dialogue process was applied in the evaluation of nominations for the 2019 cycle as an intermediary step on an experimental basis. This process allows for dialogue between the Evaluation Body and submitting States to clarify minor issues identified in nomination files, through a simple question and answer process ([Decision 13.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/10)). Acknowledging the positive experience with the dialogue, the fourteenth session of the Committee recommended that the present session of the General Assembly revise the Operational Directives to formalize the dialogue as an ‘early harvest’ of the global reflection process. Item 10 of the provisional agenda of the present session proposes the necessary revisions of the Operational Directives to implement the dialogue process ([document LHE/20/8.GA/10)](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-20-8.GA-10-EN.docx).
6. **Debates during the fourteenth session of the Committee**
7. The issues and challenges encountered through the implementation of the listing mechanisms were presented most comprehensively to the Committee at its fourteenth session ([document LHE/19/14.COM/14](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-19-14.COM-14-EN.docx)). When reviewing them, it quickly becomes evident that many of the issues are interlinked and cannot be considered in isolation of each other. For the purpose of the reflection process at hand, nevertheless, the issues have been grouped into four categories: (A) overall approach to the listing mechanisms; (B) issues related to the criteria for inscription; (C) issues related to the follow-up of inscribed elements; (D) methodology for the evaluation and examination of nominations.
8. During the deliberations at its fourteenth session, the Committee members and observers welcomed the reflection as timely, considering it as an unavoidable step for the Convention to further develop with full credibility. The Committee called for serious reflection on the overall purposes of the lists, regretting that the ambitious objectives set for the listing mechanisms during the drafting of the text of the Convention and its Operational Directives had been somewhat watered down over the years. There appeared to be a general opinion in favour of a more inclusive, fluid and dynamic Representative List that would in turn allow increased attention to be paid to the Urgent Safeguarding List and the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices. Some ideas to encourage better use of the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices included linking it with the periodic reporting mechanism and using new technologies to establish direct connections with communities without requiring interventions from States. Furthermore, the Committee identified the need to enhance the follow-up of inscribed elements with clear procedures, which should include provisions for the transfer between and removal of elements from the Lists. The Committee also thought it would be important to reflect on whether information from outside of the files submitted by States should be taken into consideration as part of the evaluation and examination of nominations. Finally, the reflection process was thought to offer a good opportunity to simplify the extension of multinational inscriptions to include new States Parties.
9. **Postponement of the category VI experts’ meeting: alternative ways forward**
10. In accordance with the above-mentioned timetable, the Secretariat had initiated the organization of a three-day physical category VI meeting of experts from 16 to 18 March to identify the main issues and approaches for solving them in order to lay the ground for the meeting of an open-ended intergovernmental working group. As a framework for the meeting, the Secretariat had commissioned two discussion papers and ensured their translation: one paper tracing the background of the listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention and the other presenting perspectives of the consultative bodies, responsible for evaluating files for inscription and selection on the two lists and the Register. Thirty-one experts with diverse profiles were selected, respecting geographical and gender balance; following a call made to States Parties to identify suitable experts. However, in light of the sanitary crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting of experts was initially postponed to September 2020. Due to the continued uncertainty concerning travel and gathering restrictions, the meeting has been postponed again to future dates.
11. In order not to further delay the process, the Secretariat proposes to follow an alternative way forward. In other words, a two-step process may replace the three-day physical meeting originally planned (see Annex for the timeline). It should be noted that this alternative modality does not hamper the overall timetable for the reflection adopted by the fourteenth session of the Committee:

* In November 2020, the Secretariat will launch an electronic consultation with the experts to seek their comments on the main challenges identified so far concerning the listing mechanisms as well as on possible approaches for finding solutions; the experts will be asked to return the questionnaire within two months.
* The fifteenth session of the Committee in December 2020 will be asked to take note of the updates regarding changes to the reflection process and provide further elements to the reflection.
* In February/March 2021, the first (online) plenary meeting will be organized with the participation of the experts and observers to discuss the background information and two discussion papers, as well as to constitute breakout groups.
* Through online forums, the experts will work in their respective breakout groups to analyse the results of the survey in February/March.
* In March 2021, the second (online) plenary meeting will be organized to take stock of the results of the above-mentioned breakout groups to formulate concrete recommendations.
* The conclusions of the meeting of the experts shall be presented, in the form of a working document, to the meeting of an open-ended intergovernmental working group to be held in June 2021.

1. The General Assembly may wish to adopt the following resolution:

DRAFT RESOLUTION 8.GA 11

The General Assembly,

1. Having examined document LHE/20/8.GA/11 as well as document [LHE/19/14.COM/14](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-19-14.COM-14-EN.docx),
2. Recalling Decisions [13.COM 6](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/6), [13.COM 10](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/10) and [14.COM 14](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/14),
3. Reaffirms the need for a global reflection on the listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention;
4. Renews its gratitude to the Government of Japan for its contribution to support the global reflection on the listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention;
5. Takes note of the alternative modality for conducting the category VI preliminary experts’ meeting and the intention to update the fifteenth session of the Committee on these changes;
6. Further takes note of the revised provisional timeline for the reflection on the listing mechanisms of the 2003 Convention, as contained in the Annex to this Resolution, including the open-ended intergovernmental working group scheduled for June 2021;
7. Requests that the Secretariat report to the sixteenth session of the Committee on the progress achieved in the reflection process, in particular on the results of the aforementioned working group.

**Annex**

**Timeline for the reflection on listing mechanisms under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

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| November 2020 | Launch of the online survey |
| **14 to 19 December 2020** | **Fifteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee** |
| January 2021 | Deadline for experts to complete the survey |
| February 2021 | First online plenary meeting of experts and creation of breakout groups |
| February/March 2021 | Analysis of the survey results through online breakout group meetings |
| March 2021 | Second online plenary meeting of experts (Day 1): Presentations of recommendations by breakout groups |
| March 2021 | Second online plenary meeting of experts (Day 2): Harmonization of recommendations and conclusions |
| May 2021 | Online publication of the working documents for the open-ended intergovernmental working group |
| June 2021 | Meeting of the open-ended intergovernmental working group |
| **November/December 2021** | **Sixteenth session of the Intergovernmental Committee** |