

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF STATES PARTIES TO THE
CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**First session
Paris, UNESCO Headquarters
27-29 June 2006**

ORAL REPORT

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Paris, 29 June 2006**

Mr President of the General Assembly,
Ms Françoise Rivière, Assistant Director-General for Culture,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to thank all States Parties to the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage for having designated me as Rapporteur of this first session of the General Assembly and for the confidence you have placed in me. I will try to reflect as faithfully and as objectively as possible our deliberations while underscoring the many highlights of these three days. I would highly appreciate your indulgence for any insufficiencies or omissions which may occur in my report.

I will concentrate on the main thrust of our debate and will not mention the names of each individual who took the floor. Furthermore, allow me to indicate that all decisions which have been adopted will be attached as an annex to the Draft Summary Records of this 1st session of our General Assembly.

The rigour of our experienced Presidents, H.E. Mr Mohammed Bedjaoui during the first two days, and H.E Mr Luiz Filipe de Macedo Soares during this last day of our session, combined with their incredible patience and wisdom, created a constructive working ambiance which allowed us, within the proposed time schedule, to address a large number of issues, some of

them quite difficult and trail-blazing. Both Presidents, with their experience in managing complex agendas, were really precious to enable us to accomplish our task. However, I would also like to thank all delegations who, endowed with a deep sense of responsibility, succeeded in finding a compromise for the most difficult issue on our agenda: the distribution of seats on the Intergovernmental Committee on the basis of the principle of equitable geographical distribution.

Before summarising the debates, I would like to mention thankfully once again the open spirit and wish for mutual understanding of all Delegations. I would also like to congratulate the Director-General for the quality of the documents prepared and to reiterate our high appreciation for the Secretariat and the team of our secretary for their steady devotion to their work in favor of the intangible cultural heritage. Special thanks go to the interpreters.

Having said this, I will present my report :

Item 1 of the General Assembly

The first session of the General Assembly of States Parties for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage started on Tuesday 27 June with an official opening ceremony presided over by the Director-General during which the following guests of honor took the floor:

H. E. Mr Mohammed Bedjaoui, President of the Intergovernmental Meeting for the Elaboration of the Draft Convention;

H.E. Mr Kenji Kosaka, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Sciences and Technology, Japan;

Mrs Mehriban Aliyeva, First Lady of Azerbaijan and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Oral and Musical Traditions;

Mr Kebede Kassa, Focal Point for Culture, Department of Social Affairs, Representative of the President of the Commission of the African Union:

H.E. Mr. Zhang Xinsheng, President of the Executive Board of UNESCO;

H.E. Mr. Musa Bin Jaafar Bin Hassan, President of the General Conference of UNESCO.

Then, the General Assembly elected its Bureau:

President: H.E. Mr Mohammed Bedjaoui

Vice-Presidents: Brazil, Ethiopia, India and Romania

Rapporteur : myself, your humble servant

The President invited States Parties wanting to make an official statement to do so. Twenty-four States Parties took the floor expressing their intentions and expectations towards a brand-new Convention. They informed the General Assembly about ongoing safeguarding activities for the intangible cultural heritage present in their country and congratulated the President for his election, while recalling with gratitude his contribution to the elaboration of the text of the 2003 Convention.

The States Parties also recalled the importance of the 2003 Convention, underlining the urgency to safeguard the important but fragile intangible heritage in a spirit of mutual understanding and through international cooperation. An overwhelming support for the objectives and the scope of the Convention was expressed and many States Parties emphasized its importance for the protection of the cultural diversity in their countries. Most of the States Parties indicated that they were already actively involved in preparing and implementing safeguarding measures for their intangible cultural heritage. Several representatives expressed the willingness of their government to support the implementation of projects in other regions, and their intention to do so in the framework of the Convention.

All declarations made by States Parties will be made available in the draft summary report established by the Secretariat.

Item 2

In the afternoon of Tuesday 27 June, the President opened the debate on item 2 relating to the “Adoption of the agenda and timetable”.

The agenda was adopted without modification.

Item 3

Introducing item 3 of the agenda, the President proposed that article 13 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure concerning equitable geographical distribution of membership on the Committee might be discussed separately. He invited the General Assembly to consider establishing an informal working group with two representatives per electoral group for a preliminary discussion of the subject. The debate on Rule 13 was continued during the discussion of item 6A of the

agenda, which concerned the distribution of seats among the electoral groups when electing an 18-member Committee.

The General Assembly accepted this proposal and adopted Rules 1 to 12, 14, 15.2, 15.4 to 15.8, 15.10 and 16 to 18 of the Provisional Rules of Procedure on a provisional basis, after having discussed and adopted amendments. These concern:

- Rule 11.2, on the deadline for the circulation to the States Parties of draft resolutions and amendments,
- Rule 15.7, on the validity of voting papers in the framework of the election of Members of the Committee,
- Rule 16.3, on the deadline for the submission of official documents of the General Assembly.

Rules 15.1, 15.3 and 15.9 were put between brackets for later consideration, since they are related to article 13. With the exception of Rules 13, 15.1, 15.3 and 15.9, the Rules of Procedure were provisionally adopted.

Item 4

On Wednesday 28 June, after the accreditation of observers and the constitution of a working group composed of 2 members per electoral group, the President opened the debate on item 4 of the agenda : "Determination of a uniform percentage of States Parties' contribution to the regular budget of UNESCO for establishing their contribution to the Fund for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage". Ten States Parties intervened on this item. All Delegates who took the floor agreed to set the uniform percentage at 1%. A debate was held on the beginning of the period for which contribution would be requested: either from the date of entering into force of the Convention or from the 1st of January 2007. Following the debate, it was agreed to align the contribution with the biennial system of UNESCO and to mention in the decision the period from the entry into force of the Convention, that is 20 April 2006, until 31 December 2007. Resolution 1. GA 4 was adopted accordingly.

Item 5

Within the framework of the debate on item 5, "Date and venue of the sessions of the General Assembly", all nine States Parties who took the floor, rejected the proposal to organize the General Assembly every second year immediately following the ordinary sessions of the General

Conference. In line with Article 4 of the Convention, it was decided that the next ordinary session of the General Assembly should be organized in June 2008. Draft Resolution 1. GA 5 was adopted as amended in the light of the debates.

The President invited the General Assembly to take a decision on the date of the election of six additional seats to increase the number of Committee members to 24. The General Assembly decided that this election would be organized before the first session of the Intergovernmental Committee through the convening of an extraordinary General Assembly during the 175th session of the Executive Board of UNESCO.

Item 6A

After the discussion of agenda item 5, the Plenary was suspended in order to allow the working group to use the room of the Plenary, and to be able to benefit from interpretation in all six working languages of the Organization. The working group held its deliberations on possible implementations of the principle of equitable geographical distribution among the membership of the Intergovernmental Committee during the last hour and a half of the morning of the second day under the presidency of the Delegate from Mexico, Mr Alfredo Miranda.

In the afternoon of Wednesday 28 June, the Chairperson of the General Assembly invited the Chairperson of the working group to report to the Plenary about the results of the debate on Rule 13 and about the positions of the electoral groups. Since no full consensus had been reached, the debate was continued in the Plenary. The item led to intensive debate: some electoral groups were in favor of accepting the proposal made by the Secretariat, others preferring systems in which the same number of seats would be attributed to all of the electoral groups. The debate continued on Thursday 29 June. The Assembly agreed that the proportional system would be used with the provision that to each electoral groups at least two seats would be attributed in a Committee of 18 Members, and at least three seats in a Committee of 24. Rules 15.1, 15.3 and 15.9, which had been put into brackets, were adopted, as well as sub-paragraphs (i) and (ii) of Rule 13, as amended. There was a debate about proposals to also establish an upper limit for seats available per electoral group in a 24-member Committee. If one of these proposals is adopted, it might form an additional sub-paragraph of Rule 13.2; it was, however, decided that the discussion would be continued at the next session of the General Assembly. These decisions being made, the General Assembly adopted the whole lot of the Rules of Procedure.

Item 6B

Since it was decided, under item 5 of the agenda, to hold the next General Assembly in June 2008, the terms of office of the States Members of the Committee in its first composition would not deviate from what is regulated in Article 6.3 of the Convention. Item 6B, therefore, had become redundant and was cancelled.

Item 6C: Election of the Committee

The Assembly decided to proceed with the elections of the 18-member Committee according to the distribution of seats proposed in document 6A, following the principles laid down in Rule 13. On Thursday 29 June, around noon, the President proposed that the Assembly start with the election of the Members of the Committee.

In a spirit of consensus, a number of Delegations informed the President of the withdrawal of the candidature of their country, namely:

Group I : Luxembourg;

Group Va : Mali, Mauritius;

Group Vb : Egypt, Jordan, Syria.

Since for Group I and Vb the number of candidates was identical to the number of seats to be filled, the General Assembly proceeded with the election of Members for the Committee for electoral groups II, III, IV et Va.

Under the careful supervision of the tellers, the representatives from Moldova and Mauritius, the following States Parties were elected as Members of the Committee:

Group I : Belgium, Turkey;

Group II : Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Romania;

Group III : Brazil, Mexico, Peru;

Group IV : China, India, Japan, Viet Nam;

Group Va : Gabon, Nigeria, Senegal;

Group Vb : Algeria, United Arab Emirates.

I am very pleased to inform the General Assembly that all ballot papers were valid and that there were no abstentions.

It was decided that the selection by lot of the members of the Committee whose terms of office will be limited in the sense of Article 6.3 of the Convention, will occur at the next extraordinary session of the General Assembly after the six additional members of the Committee will have been elected.

Item 7A

The General Assembly welcomed by acclamation the proposal of Algeria to host the first session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Algiers, at the end of October 2006.

I hope that I have managed to convey to you the richness of the discussions and the complexity of the issues that have been dealt with during this General Assembly. I am pleased to state that our respective points of view have come to an equitable compromise on all issues.

Thank you for your attention.