

Annex 1

Culture Under Covid-19

While preparing to finalize our periodic report on the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, the entire world fell under the shadow of the Covid-19 crisis. Culture - whether products, activities, or services, and whether at the governmental or the private sector – was negatively influenced. News of the spread of the pandemic and awareness programs on how to prevent it occupied a great portion of broadcast hours. Theaters, cinemas and libraries were closed and many artists were unable to make a living.

Under such circumstances, it is worth noting that the initiatives launched by the Ministry of Culture to confront such a challenge were conducted via three main pillars, namely:

First, utilizing the time during which activities were halted to enhance 49 cultural sites spread all over the country – in cities, villages, coasts, oases, at a cost that reached EGP 28 million distributed among theaters, cinemas, libraries, and training centers.

Second, raising the citizens' awareness of the dangers of Covid-19 by printing leaflets and making them available at the Culture Houses spread all over the country, as well as online. The Ministry then launched the digital initiative “Stay at Home ... Culture is between Your Hands,” which started to broadcast its cultural content from 24 March, 2020, and utilized the digital environment to broadcast activities that included Arabic and classical music concerts, a cinema club, documentaries, digital visits to museums and theatres, ballet performances, and books, in addition to a cultural salon on the most important artistic icons in Egypt. The reception of the initiative was astounding: more than 31 million visitors, two million viewers of whom interacted; subscriptions to the channel exceeded 106 thousand since its launching; 245,000 broadcasting hours, and spectatorship from 28 countries over the continents of the world, on top of which - after Egypt - were the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Morocco, USA, United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Kuwait, Iraq, Canada, Tunisia, Germany, England, and Jordan. The youth enjoyed the highest percentage of participation, as the percentage rates were as follows: ages (from 13 to 17 [3%]) – (from 18 to 34 [58%]) – (from 35 to 40 [32%]) – (from 55 to 65+ [7%]).

At the theater sector affiliated to the Ministry, a digital portal to train actors was launched under the title of “Start Your Dream Online”.

The Supreme Council for Culture, headed by the Minister, launched an initiative under the title of “Culture at Your Home”, which largely depends on the facilities availed by the digital environment, where diverse cultural gatherings are broadcast on the internet. The Council managed through it to communicate with the largest possible number of interested people and open a window of opportunity before the largest number of

researchers and innovators from Egypt, most Arab countries, and some Western countries, including all generations and orientations to offer their contributions. The Council's initiative, that began with the series of "Read with Us", developed into 10+ series: Read with Us, Culture Online, Culture Brings Us Closer, Our Life with Music, Plastic Arts Series, and Cultural Relations Series. Such activities attracted a wide audience.

Her excellency the Minister of Culture presided over the virtual meeting of Arab Ministers of Culture to formulate common plans to confront covid-19, and the Minister also participated in the virtual meeting of the Ministers of Culture for the member states of the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO).

Third, preparing for the gradual launching of cultural activities after the curfew, by taking all the precautionary measures to ensure the safety of the audience at libraries and museums, in addition to setting up open theaters. The National Opera House offered concerts on open air stages with live broadcast online and via media. The Ministry also launched the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre (CIFCET) with contributions of pre-recorded performances and live ones that heeded the terms of social distancing. Theatrical performances were offered to the audience while adhering to sanitary measures, and symposiums were held at the Supreme Council of Culture on a variety of issues with the presence of men of letters and the audience, while simultaneously broadcasting them to the audience online.

Such initiatives launched by the Ministry of Culture constituted a discovery of the potentials of the virtual environment and an increase in the availability of cultural content to different segments of the audience who could not participate in the actual activities. Thus, these initiatives played a vital role in forwarding similar cultural events carried out by individuals, private publishing houses, and CSOs, in addition to holding the international El Gouna Film Festival. The virtual environment became a recognized cultural channel and a platform for the expression of cultural and intellectual innovations.

Annex 2

Summary of the meeting with the civil society organizations

The meeting was attended by the representatives of the following NGOs:

- Al Warcha theater group
- Angelic organization for cultural development
- Nubian heritage association
- Art d'Egypte
- Culture Wheel center
- Afca for Arts and Culture
- Sahara association – Siwa
- Jesuites Association for cultural and scientific renaissance

Topics discussed:

- Summary on the report convention
- Introduction on the NGOs activities
- Challenges facing the civil society sector in Egypt
- Drafting the recommendations

Main recommendations:

- Taxes exemption for cultural organizations
- Linking the activities of the NGOs organizations with the objectives of strategy 2030
- The state to include the plans of the civil society organizations in their strategy
- To create a coordinating entity between the civil society organizations and the ministry of Culture