**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 9 of the Provisional Agenda:**

**Intangible cultural heritage in emergencies**

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| **Summary**  The Committee has undertaken a reflection on the role of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies over the past four cycles. At its fourteenth session in 2019, the Committee endorsed the operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies and requested that they be presented to the eighth session of the General Assembly for examination. The present document provides the operational principles and modalities in annex and describes their background, content and relevance for the next phase of work.  **Decision required:** paragraph 14 |

**Background**

1. UNESCO has been increasingly called upon to provide assistance to Member States affected by the rising number of emergencies, including conflicts and disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards. To this end, the Committee of the 2003 Convention has undertaken a reflection on the role of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies over the past four statutory cycles (2016–2019), culminating in the elaboration of operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies (see annex).
2. While examining the topic for the first time at its eleventh session in 2016, the Committee underscored the dual nature of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies – both as being under threat and as a powerful tool for recovery and resilience – and requested that the Secretariat gather more knowledge and experience on the topic ([document ITH/16/11.COM/15](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-16-11.COM-15-EN.docx); [Decision 11.COM 15](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/11.COM/15)). At its twelfth session in 2017, the Committee examined the results of the activities undertaken by the Secretariat in conflicts and disasters. It pointed to a future direction that privileges community-based needs identifications and asked the Secretariat to enhance awareness raising and capacity building on the topic and to strengthen cooperation with relevant United Nations entities ([document ITH/17/12.COM/15](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-17-12.COM-15-EN.docx); [Decision 12.COM 15](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/12.COM/15)). Building on this work, at its thirteenth session in 2018, the Committee felt that the time had come to define operational modalities for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies and requested that the Secretariat ‘organize an individual expert meeting during the course of 2019 to conceptualize and transform the knowledge and experience acquired into methodological guidance for States Parties, or for any other relevant national or international stakeholders’ ([document ITH/18/13.COM/11](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ITH-18-13.COM-11-EN.docx); [Decision 13.COM 11](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/13.COM/11)).
3. To this end, the Secretariat organized an expert meeting on intangible cultural heritage in emergencies at UNESCO Headquarters on 21 and 22 May 2019. With the generous support from the People’s Republic of China, the meeting brought together twenty-one experts from the six UNESCO electoral groups. In preparation for the meeting, the Secretariat prepared a working document ([document LHE/19/EXP/2](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-19-EXP-2-EN.docx)) on defining methodological guidance for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies. Further details on the discussions that took place during the expert meeting are presented in the meeting report ([document LHE/19/EXP/5](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/46083-EN.pdf)) and summary records ([document LHE/19/14.COM/INF.13](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-19-14.COM-INF.13-EN.docx)). The experts reached agreement on a set of operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies. Along with the results of the expert meeting, these were presented and endorsed by the Committee at its fourteenth session in 2019 ([document LHE/19/14.COM/13 Rev.](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-19-14.COM-13_REV-EN.docx), [Decision 14.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/13)).
4. **Operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies**
5. The operational principles and modalities offer guidance to States Parties and other relevant national or international stakeholders on how best to ensure that intangible cultural heritage is most effectively engaged and safeguarded in the context of various types of emergencies. They do not aim to define an exhaustive list of actions to be undertaken in an emergency, but rather present underpinning principles and modalities for interventions related to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies that can be adapted to diverse contexts.
6. The operational principles and modalities are in line with the [Strategy for the reinforcement of UNESCO’s action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235186)[[1]](#footnote-1) and its [Addendum concerning emergencies associated with disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259805?posInSet=2&queryId=df3a8b4d-303b-4a77-a734-dbb85f794eb7).[[2]](#footnote-2) The six overarching principles, which the experts agreed should underpin all interventions aimed at safeguarding and/or engaging intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, address both conflicts and disasters. They are complemented by action-oriented modalities identified by the experts as appropriate to the three main stages of an emergency management cycle – namely preparedness, response and recovery – as is consistent with the UNESCO Strategy.
7. The operational principles and modalities recall key elements from previous Committee discussions on approaches to safeguard intangible cultural heritage in emergencies. First, they highlight the dual nature of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies: that emergencies directly threaten the transmission and viability of intangible cultural heritage, on the one hand, and can be harnessed as a resource to support preparedness, response and recovery processes on the other. Second, they underscore the usefulness of community-based needs identifications and approaches, which can serve as a starting point when reviewing the impact of a crisis on specific traditions and practices, and for understanding how their safeguarding can help communities surmount them.
8. Emergencies present complex fields of intervention and care should be exercised when talking about generic measures, which should always be adapted to local circumstances and conditions. In situations where lives are at risk, it is important to remain cognizant of the sensitivity of the issues involved. The operational principles and modalities call attention to the primary role of communities to identify how their intangible cultural heritage is affected by an emergency and how they might draw on it as a resource for addressing the multiple challenges they face. In line with the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, the agreement and consent of communities should always be obtained prior to any operational action on the ground.
9. The operational principles and modalities serve as a platform to sensitize a wide range of relevant actors on the issues at stake when safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies. This includes actors working in the field of culture, but also national and international stakeholders involved in emergency management, including disaster preparedness and relief specialists, humanitarian actors, non-governmental organizations and armed forces.
10. **Future orientations**
11. Based on the results of the expert meeting, and following the request of the Committee, the General Assembly is asked to examine the operational principles and modalities included in annex below. They respond to the need to provide guidance to States Parties and other relevant stakeholders on the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, as well as its potential to be harnessed by communities as a tool for resilience, recovery and reconciliation. The urgent need for such guidance was made apparent this year with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which both destabilized the safeguarding of living heritage and demonstrated remarkable instances of resilience as communities across the globe mobilized their heritage as a source of solidarity and togetherness.
12. More broadly, the development of the operational principles and modalities marks a shift in the work of the Secretariat towards a more operational phase on the topic of emergencies. They provide a theoretical and methodological foundation for implementing a range of practical projects that will contribute to the ongoing mobilization and safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies. Through their implementation in different emergency contexts, the understanding of the operational principles and modalities will become more refined over time to reflect the complexities that different emergency situations present. To this end, the Committee encouraged States Parties, and other relevant national and international stakeholders, to implement and adapt the operational principles to their specific contexts.
13. The work during this next phase will require tailored capacity building to meet the needs of the different emergency situations and actors involved. While the operational principles and modalities cover both conflict and disaster situations, there remains major differences between these two types of emergencies. Progress has been made regarding disasters with the development of capacity-building materials aimed at fostering an understanding of the links between disaster risk reduction and inventories of intangible cultural heritage. The [guidance note](https://ich.unesco.org/en/guidance-note-on-inventorying-00966) on inventorying intangible cultural heritage has also been updated to enhance understanding of the need to integrate disaster awareness into community-based inventorying. Further work is planned, thanks to a generous contribution from Switzerland in 2019, to strengthen capacities to integrate disaster risk reduction into inventories of intangible cultural heritage. A voluntary contribution was also received from Azerbaijan to support capacity building in situations of conflict, including forced displacement. As per the request by the Committee ([Decision 14.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/13)), the Secretariat will continue to ensure proper planning and implementation of these initiatives and report back on progress made to the Committee.
14. The work undertaken by the Secretariat on emergencies contributes to the Organisation’s wider action to protect culture in emergencies. The operational principles and modalities aim to support Member States to implement the 2003 Convention in emergency situations through better preparedness and response. In recognizing that tangible and intangible heritage are often inextricably linked in an emergency, they also seek to foster greater cooperation and collaboration across the fields of heritage safeguarding. In this regard, and upon the Committee’s request ([Decision 14.COM 13](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/14.COM/13)), the Secretariat is exploring possibilities to strengthen synergies with the Secretariat of the Second Protocol (1999) to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict.
15. Given the high demand and complexity of the subject, further work is needed to understand how the operational principles and modalities can be adapted to different emergency contexts. The Committee encouraged States Parties to pursue their efforts in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in diverse emergency situations and invited contributions from States Parties to implement a range of practical projects, in the sense of the operational principles and modalities. The General Assembly may further wish to encourage States Parties to consider the possibility of financially supporting future work on intangible cultural heritage in emergencies through the modality of their choice.
16. The General Assembly may wish to adopt the following resolution:

DRAFT RESOLUTION 8.GA 9

The General Assembly,

1. Having examined document LHE/20/8.GA/9 and its annex,
2. Recalling Article 11 of the Convention, Chapters VI.3 and VI.4 of the Operational Directives, the fifth point of the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, along with Resolutions 38C/48 and 39C/35 of the General Conference on the Strategy for the reinforcement of UNESCO’s action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict, its Action Plan and its Addendum concerning emergencies associated with disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards, as well as United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017), and all relevant rules of International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law, both as treaty and customary law,
3. Expresses its full support to individuals, groups and communities in situations of emergency and acknowledges their extraordinary courage and bravery in exploring creative ways of maintaining the practice and transmission of their living heritage despite the challenging contexts they face;
4. Reaffirms the dual role that safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies can play, both to mitigate threats to the intangible cultural heritage itself and as a powerful tool to help communities prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, including the effects of climate change;
5. Appreciates the in-depth reflection carried out by the Committee on the role of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, as well as the accompanying work undertaken by the Secretariat to collect case studies, conduct pilot activities and develop a capacity-building approach for building a suitable methodological framework on the topic;
6. Thanks the People’s Republic of China for their generous contribution to the expert meeting on intangible cultural heritage and emergencies held at UNESCO Headquarters in May 2019;
7. Approves the operational principles and modalities for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies, as annexed to this resolution;
8. Encourages States Parties, and any other relevant national or international stakeholders, to initiate steps to implement and adapt the operational principles and modalities to their specific contexts and to implement a range of practical projects, which will contribute to the ongoing safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies;
9. Requests that the Secretariat continue its efforts to develop a capacity-building approach to operationalize the proposed principles and modalities and build awareness of their importance among relevant stakeholders, as well as to explore linkages and cooperation with other Conventions and programmes in the field of culture, along with UN organizations and international bodies in related areas;
10. Further encourages States Parties to consider the possibility of financially supporting future work on intangible cultural heritage in emergencies through the modality of their choice.

**ANNEX**

**Operational principles and modalities for  
safeguarding intangible cultural heritage in emergencies**

Cultural heritage throughout the world is increasingly affected by emergency situations, including conflicts and disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards (‘natural disasters’). These situations include threats to the transmission and viability of intangible cultural heritage, which provide a foundation for the identity and well-being of communities, groups and individuals [hereafter ‘communities’]. The safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage has a dual role to play in the context of emergencies: on the one hand, intangible cultural heritage can be directly threatened by emergencies, and on the other hand, it can effectively help communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

Emergencies present a complex field of operation due to the variety in nature and scale of armed conflicts and natural disasters and the range of stakeholders involved. The following operational principles and modalities offer guidance to States Parties and other relevant national or international stakeholders on how best to ensure that intangible cultural heritage is most effectively engaged and safeguarded in the context of various types of emergencies.

The operational principles and modalities below are in line with the [Strategy for the reinforcement of UNESCO’s action for the protection of culture and the promotion of cultural pluralism in the event of armed conflict](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235186)[[3]](#footnote-3) and its [Addendum concerning emergencies associated with disasters caused by natural and human-induced hazards](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259805?posInSet=2&queryId=df3a8b4d-303b-4a77-a734-dbb85f794eb7),[[4]](#footnote-4) as well as United Nations Security Council Resolution 2347 (2017). They should also be considered in tandem with the relevant provisions of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and its Operational Directives, notably [Chapter VI[[5]](#footnote-5) on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development at the national level](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-Operational_Directives-7.GA-PDF-EN.pdf), as well as the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage.

**Principles**

The following principles shall underpin all interventions aimed at safeguarding and/or engaging intangible cultural heritage in emergencies:

1. Intangible cultural heritage exists only in its enactment by the communities who practise and transmit it, and is inseparable from their social, cultural and economic life. Its safeguarding is therefore indivisible from the protection of the lives and well-being of its bearers.
2. Communities whose intangible cultural heritage may be affected by an emergency include people in the natural disaster or armed conflict area, displaced persons and their host communities, as well as other people and groups connected with this intangible cultural heritage.
3. In all phases of emergency, the communities shall play a primary role in identifying their intangible cultural heritage. This requires the direct inclusion of the communities in identifying how their intangible cultural heritage might have been affected by the emergency and what measures are needed to safeguard it, as well as how they might draw on it as a resource for enhancing their resilience, facilitating recovery and re-establishing trust and peaceful coexistence within and between communities.
4. With reference to Article 11 of the Convention, States Parties shall take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in their territory. This provision applies in all contexts, including when intangible cultural heritage is affected by an emergency. In so doing, States Parties shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities in safeguarding actions, including refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants present in their territories.
5. National and international stakeholders involved in emergency management – including disaster preparedness and relief specialists, humanitarian actors, non-governmental organizations and armed forces – have an important role to play in safeguarding affected intangible cultural heritage and supporting concerned communities to draw on this heritage in preparing for and responding to emergencies.
6. Intangible cultural heritage is dynamic and adaptive in nature, constantly being recreated by communities in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, including emergencies. In all situations, efforts to safeguard or engage intangible cultural heritage should take into account and respect this dynamic and adaptive nature.

**Modalities**

The following modalities integrate the above principles and identify actions appropriate to the three main phases in an emergency management cycle of preparedness, response and recovery, acknowledging that each phase can vary in duration and may overlap with other phases. Local circumstances and conditions will determine which of these actions would be most relevant and appropriate to a particular intangible cultural heritage element or situation.

**Preparedness**

1. Raise the awareness and build the capacities of relevant stakeholders regarding the dual nature of intangible cultural heritage in emergencies and the present principles and modalities.
2. Provide resources and support for the capacity of communities to engage in all aspects of risk reduction and emergency preparedness in consultation with other stakeholders, especially in regions and countries prone to emergencies.
3. Integrate into inventories of intangible cultural heritage, as provided for in the 2003 Convention, information on the vulnerability of elements to potential emergencies. This should include the mitigation capacity of these elements, as well as details of the concerned locations and communities to facilitate identification and access during emergency response.
4. Include emergency preparedness in the safeguarding plans of specific elements. This can include preventive measures to address their potential vulnerability during an emergency, preparatory measures to enhance and engage their mitigation capacity, and a methodology to evaluate the situation of the element during the emergency response phase.
5. Incorporate relevant intangible cultural heritage in local, national, sub-regional and regional risk reduction and emergency preparedness.
6. Establish links between bodies safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage and those in charge of emergency preparedness.

**Response**

1. Identify, locate and reach out to communities whose intangible cultural heritage is known or likely to have been affected by the emergency, as early as possible.
2. Prioritize resourcing and supporting the capacity of concerned communities to identify and address, through a community-based approach, their immediate safeguarding needs and to draw upon their intangible cultural heritage in mitigating the immediate effects of the emergency (community-based needs identification). In some contexts, it will only be possible to implement this set of actions during the recovery phase.
3. Share information within and between affected States Parties and other stakeholders, particularly humanitarian actors, relevant non-governmental organizations and/or armed forces, to determine the nature and extent of the disruption to intangible cultural heritage and the scope for engaging it in mitigation. This is also to ensure that relief operations take full account of the existing intangible cultural heritage and contribute to its safeguarding.
4. Whenever a post-disaster or post-conflict needs assessment is undertaken, notably in the framework of multiparty international crisis response mechanisms, ensure that intangible cultural heritage is incorporated. Involve communities in the assessment of the effects of the natural disaster and/or armed conflict on their intangible cultural heritage as well as of related economic damage and losses, and human development impacts.

**Recovery**

1. Carry out the community-based needs identification if this could not be performed earlier.
2. Based on the outcomes of the needs identification process, provide resources and support for communities to develop and undertake safeguarding measures or plans to enhance the mitigation capacity of their intangible cultural heritage. This engagement should be sustained throughout the recovery phase and into the following preparedness phase, as well as in the transition from dependence on humanitarian assistance towards development.
3. Engage intangible cultural heritage in fostering dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation between and within communities, including between displaced populations and host communities.

**Note**: Resources and financial support shall be sought under the various emergency-related funds, including the UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund (emergency International Assistance). The listing mechanisms under the 2003 Convention may provide an opportunity for promoting and enhancing the visibility of elements that contribute to preparing for, responding to and recovering from the effects of natural disasters and/or armed conflicts (the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, as well as the Register of Good Safeguarding Practices), and/or to draw the attention of the international community to elements particularly threatened by a natural disaster and/or armed conflict (for the possibility of the accelerated procedure for a nomination to the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, see criterion U.6 under Chapter I.1 of the Operational Directives of the 2003 Convention).

1. . <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235186> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. . <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259805> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. . <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000235186> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. . <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259805> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. . <https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/ICH-Operational_Directives-7.GA-PDF-EN.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)