

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

**First session
Algiers, Algeria
Sheraton Hotel
18 and 19 November 2006**

ORAL REPORT

**by Mr Jean-Pierre Ducastelle
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Algiers, 19 November 2006

Ms President of the Intergovernmental Committee,
Mr President of the General Conference,
Ms Françoise Rivière, Assistant Director-General for Culture,
Honourable Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to thank the States Members and the President of the Committee for entrusting me with the task of reporting on the debates of the first session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Allow me to express, on behalf of everyone, heartfelt thanks to the Algerian authorities and the Permanent Delegation of Algeria to UNESCO for their excellent organization of the session and the welcome extended to the Committee in Algeria, the first of the Member States of UNESCO having ratified the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

It is incumbent on me to reflect as faithfully and objectively as possible the matters covered by our deliberations, with emphasis on the high points of the two days. May I beg your indulgence for any shortcomings or omissions.

In principle, I shall not list the Member States that have participated in the discussions, nor will I read to you the full text of the decisions we have taken. Moreover, I should like to remind you that these decisions will be recorded in the summary records of the session.

The rigour with which the President conducted the debates, her patience and good sense of timing helped to create a cordial working environment which enabled us to examine the eight items on the agenda within the allotted time. We needed, Madam, to be guided by your leadership in order to complete our work on such a full and complex agenda in view of the main issues that had to be addressed and the interest shown by the States Members. I should also like to thank Vice-President Diop for having taken the chair in replacement of Madam the Minister.

In concluding this introduction, I should like to emphasize the spirit of openness and mutual understanding shown by the delegates in all circumstances and congratulate the

Director-General on the quality of the documents submitted to us. I also wish to take the opportunity to express once again our admiration for the members of the Secretariat whom we commend for their competence and dedication.

Item 1 : Opening of the session

The first session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage began on Saturday, 18 November, with an official opening ceremony presided over by H.E. Mr Mohammed Bedjaoui, President of the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention, Minister of State, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria, and Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, during which the floor was also taken by:

- H.E. Mr Musa Bin Jaafar Bin Hassan, President of the General Conference of UNESCO
- H.E. Ms Khalida Toumi, Minister of Culture of Algeria.

In order to be able to elect a Bureau in accordance with the rules, the Committee was required first to adopt its Rules of Procedure. The Committee decided, firstly, to elect the President of the session, secondly to adopt its Rules of Procedure and, finally, to elect the full Bureau. H.E. Ms Khalida Toumi, Minister of Culture of Algeria, was elected, unanimously and by acclamation, President of the first session of the Committee.

Item 2 : Adoption of the Rules of Procedure

Following her election, the President submitted the Rules of Procedure of the Intergovernmental Committee for discussion and adoption, proposing to proceed Rule by Rule. The debates focused mainly on the following four questions:

- equitable geographic distribution of the members of the Committee's Bureau,
- the venue of the Committee's session,
- advisory organisations,
- the Committee's working languages.

The Intergovernmental Committee adopted its Rules of Procedure; proposed Rules 8.2, 8.4, 12.1, 13.2, 15.1, 15.2, 16.1, 16.2, 20, 21, 21.1, 37, 39 and 43.1 were amended, proposed Rules 20.3, 21.3, 40 and 41 were deleted.

Item 3 : Election of the members of the Bureau of the first session

In the morning of 19 November, the Committee elected its full Bureau:

- Chairperson: H.E. Ms Khalida Toumi, Minister of Culture of Algeria;
- Vice-Chairs: Bolivia, Estonia, China and Senegal;
- Rapporteur: Mr Jean-Pierre Ducastelle (Belgium).

Item 4 : Adoption of the agenda

The Chairperson then proposed to adopt the agenda.

The Committee did so after having reversed the order of items 6 and 7 and inserted, between items 4 and 5, an item on the admission of observers. After the list of observers was read out, they were admitted to this session of the Committee.

Item 5 : Preparation of texts required for the implementation of the Convention

In introducing item 5, the President invited the Secretariat to give a brief outline of the proposed document concerning the preparation of the texts required for the implementation of the Convention. She stressed the importance of the matters covered by items 5, 6 and 7 of the agenda as starting points for the debate on the operational directives.

Many delegates expressed their concern over the understanding by the general public of the notion of intangible cultural heritage and the related terminology. In addition, emphasis was laid on the need to respect the spirit of the Convention and to strike a fair balance between demands and the measures proposed.

Overall, the outline of the draft operational directives submitted by the Secretariat was accepted with interest by the delegates. They held lengthy discussions on the proposed chapter 3 which mainly deals with the Representative List and they proposed, in particular, that its title be changed, or expanded by "awareness" and/or "dialogue", and that the order of Chapters 3 and 4 be reversed.

Many delegates stressed their wish that States, the general public and, above all, the communities concerned should understand better the need to take adequate measures to promote intangible cultural heritage.

After many speakers had taken the floor, the President proposed that the States Parties send written contributions regarding the preparation of the texts to the Secretariat before the end of January 2007.

Draft Decision 1.Com 5 was then adopted as amended, taking into account the day's debates and encouraging States Parties to send their written comments to the Secretariat.

Item 6 : Criteria for inscription on the Representative List

The Secretariat introduced this item, stating that the document proposes for discussion a number of criteria for the inscription of intangible cultural heritage on the Representative List and that it was a draft that did not yet require formal discussion. The criteria had been drawn up following recommendations made by experts during a series of meetings held for that purpose. The debate was chaired by Vice-President, Mr Ousman-Blondin Diop of Senegal.

The agenda item gave rise to lively debate. While emphasizing the quality of the documents submitted, the delegates expressed concern regarding the conclusions drawn by the experts consulted. In order to increase the range of sensibilities and expertise, and further involve Committee Member States, the Delegate of India proposed that a meeting of experts be held in India.

Many stated that specific, but sufficiently flexible, criteria would be needed to accommodate the great diversity of intangible cultural heritage worldwide, without being restrictive or prohibitive. The criteria should not, therefore, be definitive but adaptable to constantly changing concepts. It was also emphasized that items already proclaimed Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity should be included automatically in the Representative List.

In addition, it was stated that the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity should not be considered along the same lines as the World Heritage List since it had been established in a different frame of mind. It is, first and

foremost, the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, namely a living heritage, which should be given priority.

In view of the great diversity of intangible cultural heritage and the variety of fields covered, many delegates considered that it would be desirable not to be confined strictly to the five fields listed in the Convention and thus be open in particular to the needs of communities. Many raised questions regarding proposed criteria (vii) and (viii), notably concerning the “prior consent” of the community, group or individuals concerned. Others stated that the consent of communities was a key element of the Convention.

The principle of “limited duration of inscription” was also discussed by a number of delegates. Some considered that the inscription of an item on the Representative List should not be limited in time, as countries would be required to take adequate safeguarding measures. Others, on the contrary, were in favour of the inclusion of items of intangible cultural heritage for a limited term in order to increase the visibility of other items and to ascertain periodically the “living” character of the heritage.

As the debates cannot be recorded in their entirety in an oral report on account of their wealth and diversity, you may rest assured that they will be reflected in the summary records that will be compiled by the Secretariat.

Furthermore, the Secretariat has announced that the Intangible Heritage Section now has a portal devoted to the Convention on its Internet site, and that there will be a space reserved for Committee Members to enable them to exchange information with each other and with the Secretariat.

Draft decision 1. COM 7 was then adopted as amended.

Item 7 : Advisory assistance to the Committee

Resuming the chair, the President of the Committee invited the Secretariat to provide information on advisory assistance to the Committee. Accordingly, an account was given of the experiences gained from the Proclamations of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

Many delegates highlighted the importance of the representativeness and geographical distribution of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that were required to assist the Committee.

Some delegates spoke in favour of a general advisory body to assist the Committee in its operational work. It was proposed that private persons or community representatives might in the future be invited to share their experience and expertise, but no decision was taken on the subject. Others stressed that it was crucial to encourage bodies through which holders of intangible cultural heritage had a voice, especially those that could not rely on NGOs or specialized centres of expertise. It was decided that time should be taken to think in greater detail about this subject and on the selection criteria.

Draft decision 1. COM 6 was then adopted as amended in order to take into account the debates showing the full complexity of the subject.

Item 8 : Date and place of the Committee’s next session

The Committee accepted by acclamation Japan’s proposal to host the second ordinary session of the Intergovernmental Committee at the beginning of September 2007. China’s proposal to host an extraordinary session from 23 to 27 May 2007 in Beijing was also warmly received.

Item 9 : Election of the members of the Bureau of the second session of the Committee

The Committee then elected its Bureau for the second ordinary session of the Committee as follows:

- Chairperson: Mr Seïchi Kondo (Japan);
- Rapporteur: Mr Ousman-Blondin Diop (Senegal);
- Vice-chairs: Belgium (which will hand over the office of Vice-President to France after the May session in China), Bolivia, Estonia and Syrian Arab Republic.

I hope that I have reflected faithfully the main points of the rich debates which took place during the last two days and addressed extremely complex issues. I also hope that I have succeeded in summing up for you the two days of enthusiastic discussions held in a spirit of openness and mutual respect. I should like to remind you that the statements made by States Parties and the decisions adopted will be included in the detailed report that will be compiled by the Secretariat.

I thank you for your attention.