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

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

**Sixteenth session**

**Online**

**13 to 18 December 2021**

**Item 7.c of the Provisional Agenda:**

**Examination of the reports by States non party on the current status of elements inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity**

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| **Summary**  This document concerns the second report on the current status of two elements, originally proclaimed Masterpieces and incorporated in the Representative List, submitted by the Russian Federation, as State non party. Paragraph 169 of the Operational Directives stipulates that ‘Such (periodic) reports shall be submitted to the Committee by States non party by 15 December 2014, and every sixth year thereafter’.  **Decision required:** paragraph 5 |

1. In conformity with Article 31.1 of the Convention and upon establishment of the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (hereafter, ‘the Representative List’) in 2008, items that had been proclaimed ‘Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity’ (hereafter ‘Masterpieces’) were incorporated into the Representative List. This incorporation was applied upon all States having present on their territories one or several items proclaimed Masterpieces, whether or not they are party to the Convention.
2. In compliance with the relevant guidelines for the submission of periodic reports, Chapter V.4 of the Operational Directives (‘Reports by States non party to the Convention on elements inscribed on the Representative List’) stipulates that ‘Paragraphs 157–159 and 165–166 of these directives shall apply fully to States non party to the Convention that have in their territories items proclaimed as Masterpieces incorporated on the Representative List, and that have consented to accept the rights and obligations attendant thereon’.
3. In the current context of a near universal ratification of the 2003 Convention with currently 180 States Parties, the Russian Federation is the only State non party that has the following two elements inscribed on the Representative List:
4. Cultural space and oral culture of the Semeiskie (initially proclaimed Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2001);
5. Olonkho, Yakut heroic epos (initially proclaimed Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2005).
6. The Russian Federation has duly submitted by the deadline of 15 December 2020 its second report on these two elements, in accordance with the time schedule of submission set out in paragraph 169 of Chapter V.4: ‘Such reports shall be submitted to the Committee by States non party by 15 December 2014, and every sixth year thereafter’. Following its examination of the [first report](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/download.php?versionID=37446) at its tenth session in 2015 (Decision [10.COM 6.a](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/10.COM/6.a)), the Committee is therefore asked to examine at the current session the second cycle of reporting on these two elements by the Russian Federation, as State non party to the Convention. The overview of the report on the elements are included in the Annex of this document, whereas the complete report as submitted by the State concerned is available in English on the website of the Convention at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/7c-periodic-reporting-rl-01206>.
7. The Committee may wish to adopt the following decision:

DRAFT DECISION 16.COM 7.c

The Committee,

1. Having examined document LHE/21/16.COM/7.c,
2. Recalling Articles 31.1 of the Convention and Chapter V.4 of the Operational Directives, as well as its Decision [10.COM 6.a](https://ich.unesco.org/en/Decisions/10.COM/6.a),
3. Expresses its appreciation to the Russian Federation, a State non party to the 2003 Convention, for submitting on time its second report on the status of two elements inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity – the ‘Cultural space and oral culture of the Semeiskie’ and the ‘Olonkho, Yakut heroic epos’;
4. Takes note of the continued efforts undertaken by the Russian Federation to safeguard and promote these elements, as presented in the Annex, in particular through governmental cultural policies, awareness-raising and research activities, the integration of the elements in formal and non-formal education and their enhanced transmission;
5. Encourages the Russian Federation to address the reported threats to the safeguarding of these elements and develop measures that would contribute to their viability;
6. Requests that the Secretariat inform the Russian Federation at least nine months prior to the deadline of 15 December 2026 about the required submission of its next report on the status of these elements.

**ANNEX**

**Overview of the report submitted by the Russian Federation, a State non party  
to the 2003 Convention, on the current status of two elements  
inscribed on the Representative List**

**Cultural space and oral culture of the Semeiskie** (2008)

1. The Cultural space and oral culture of the Semeiskie provides a sense of identity for an ethno-confessional group of Transbaikalian Old-Believers in the Republic of Buryatia. They settled down in families (semeia means family in Russian) and kept old rites and ancient cultural expressions. The identity of the Semeiskie is closely associated with the language, the Old-Believers religion, spiritual and moral values, crafts, clothing, architecture, ritual poetry and singing. Its musical traditions feature polyphonic singing, the art of improvisation and a diversity of genres.
2. **Efforts to promote or reinforce the element.** The support for the Old-Believers’ culture is integrated in the cultural policy of the Republic of Buryatia, and the important events and celebrations of Transbaikalian Old-Believers are given an official status, their celebration being financed by the national budget. Several governmental and municipal institutions are engaged in the safeguarding of the element. For example, the Republic Center of Folk Arts provides methodological consultations for the heads of folklore groups and organizes creative workshops and exhibitions of folk arts and crafts. New publications are issued on the Semeiskie culture, and methodical materials developed for preschool education. Opportunities to learn local crafts are provided to children, as part of non-formal education. Collections of Old-Believers’ icons, manuscripts and ethnographic items are well preserved, and the traditional dwelling recreated in the National Museum of the Republic of Buryatia and other municipal and manor museums, while the collection of Old-Believers’ book culture is being enriched in the rare books section of the National Library of the Republic of Buryatia. Reparation and restoration works are also undertaken in the temples, public gardens and the Russian Old-Believers’ Ethnographic Museum Complex of Transbaikalian Peoples, while tourist routes are being developed for pilgrims.
3. **Community participation**. There are about 200,000 people who identify as belonging to Semeiskie living in the territory of Buryatia, which is more than 20% of its population. Communities of Old-Believers are also present outside the Republic of Buryatia in the Russian Federation, as well as in Europe and other regions. As reported, Semeiskie folklore groups, masters of arts and crafts, public activists and scientists are making considerate contributions to the safeguarding of the element. Altogether, there are forty-three creative groups, including sixteen children’s groups, safeguarding Semeiskie culture in Buryatia. Furthermore, several culture societies and educational and research institutions operate to safeguard the element. Representatives of cultural institutions of municipalities and public organizations also participated in the preparation of the report.
4. **Viability of the element**. The government supports activities aimed at safeguarding the element and ensuring its viability. Semeiskie singing has gained wide popularity and recognition throughout the country, including through local and international folklore festivals. However, continuous risks to the viability of the element persist, as indicated in the first report on the element, such as urbanization, globalization, the gradual disappearance of traditional ways of life, values and modes of transmitting the Semeiskie culture, the aging of bearers, the lack of knowledge of the Semeiskie traditions among young people and children, and the use of modern construction technologies that may lead to losing the particularities of Semeiskie architecture. In response to these challenges, new approaches and measures are being considered for safeguarding the cultural space and oral culture of the Semeiskie.

**Olonkho, Yakut heroic epos** (2008)

1. The Olonkho, Yakut heroic epos is an expression of intangible cultural heritage of the Turkic-Mongolian people in the Republic of Sakha. It reflects oral chronicles and serves as the repository of historical memory. The Olonkho is an ancient tradition of performing poetic tales that range from ten to 15,000 verses in length. It is performed by an Olonkho singer and storyteller who is master of eloquence and poetic improvisation, and encompasses numerous versions, traditionally transmitted in the family context for entertainment and education.
2. **Efforts to promote or reinforce the element**. While certain state programmes for the safeguarding of the element, which have been implemented since the previous reporting period, have been stopped, the Day of Olonkho is celebrated annually and the second Republican Decade of Olonkho (2016–25) is currently being implemented. The element has been popularized at traditional annual festivals, at the national and international levels. Every year, competitions for storytellers and performers of various ages are held, recognition titles are granted to renowned Storytellers-Olonkhosuts, and awards are given to the best performers, popularizers and masters-educators. The traditional material aspects of the element for stage design, such as costumes and character masks, are maintained as part of Olonkho performances. The revival of traditional oral storytelling of Olonkho was enhanced through oral performance schools, children’s camps and individual and studio-based apprenticeships for adults and young people. Educational and methodological kits on Olonkho texts have been created and the element has been integrated in education at various levels, from kindergarten to university. The texts of the epos have been published for the general public and translated for foreign audiences. Seminars, training courses, master classes, forums and conferences have been systematically organized. Non-traditional ways for transmitting the epos have also continued, as mentioned in the first report, through animated films for children, computer games, puppet shows and performances at theatres. Awareness has been raised about the element at regional, federal and international levels and social media networks have also been used by groups interested in the element. In addition, the integration of the element in the fields of creative economy, as well as its branding, is currently being considered.
3. **Community participation**. The inscription of the element has generated widespread interest and enthusiasm among the local population, and many safeguarding initiatives have been undertaken. For example, local communities have engaged in the archival work on famous storytellers from the past, and handwritten texts have been prepared for publication. Olonkho performances are particularly appreciated by the rural population. Ten Olonkho Houses serve as centres for safeguarding the element, yet their number has slightly diminished, compared to the thirteen such spaces built by municipalities and local communities as reported previously. Altogether, there are forty-nine folk theatres, thirty-five dance groups and forty-one folklore groups who perform local Olonkho stories as part of their repertoire. As reported, female storytellers prevail in various safeguarding activities, even though storytellers were traditionally men. Four public organizations are taking part in the safeguarding of the element, involving storytellers of older generations, masters-educators and sixty-three young Olonkho performers.
4. **Viability of the element**. As reported, the element has been endangered since the mid-twentieth century, due to the bilingualism policy (Russian and Yakut) and the change in social and linguistic environments, among others. Lately, several renowned storytellers of the epos have passed away, and the communities of the element are concerned about the possible deterioration of the element and wish to maintain the traditional ways of performing it. The currently identified and continued major threats to the viability of the element, as noted in the previous report, are the loss of communication between rural youth studying in cities and their epic local schools, and the poor coverage of the element in the media, although the element is being documented by national and municipal media for information and archiving purposes.