

Speech

by

**His Excellency
Ambassador Musa bin Jaafar bin Hassan,
President of the General Conference of UNESCO,
Permanent Delegate of the Sultanate of Oman to UNESCO**

**on the occasion of the second session of the Intergovernmental Committee
for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

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Tokyo, Japan

Your Excellency Mr. Bunmei Ibuki, Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology,
Your Excellency Mr Itsunori Onodera, Senior Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs,
Your Excellency Mr Bedjaoui, President of the General Assembly of States Parties to the Convention,
Your Excellency Mr Chairman, Ambassador Seiichi Kondo,
Your Excellency Mr Koichiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO,
Distinguished Committee Members,
Distinguished Audience,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to be with you today for the second session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Ten years have passed since the 1997 Proclamation of Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The Proclamation was an outstanding historical milestone in the expression of concern by UNESCO and the international community for the intangible heritage of humanity. It was also a step towards the signing in 2003 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

We are meeting today in Japan. The people of Japan have preserved its inherited traditions and its distinctive social norms and traditional values; they have not faltered in this endeavour, even when pressed by the urgent need to import technology and sciences. This was because the people, led by His Majesty the Emperor and by his Government, believed firmly that it was important for the Japanese family to cling to its traditions in bringing up children and to instil in them a collective spirit in order to sustain the country's recovery and protect it from the adverse effects of rapid modernization. The sciences can be passed on to others, but the issues of affections/feelings and identity cannot. As one expert put it, when we are rooted in our cultural identity, the gales from outside become a bracing, invigorating breeze.

Distinguished audience,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I come to you from a region that is proud of its tangible and intangible heritage. My region cherishes masterpieces whose origins are lost in history. Every house in every village, indeed every stone, bears the signs of history, its silence expressing some aspect of the secrets of the universe and bearing witness to the footsteps of humanity since the dawn of human presence on Earth. It brings me great joy to feel in Japan both a boundless aspiration to modernization and to see the preservation of the cultural masterpieces of ancient civilizations in this part of the world. All of this makes one aware of a great wealth that is both material and spiritual. The city of Kyoto stands as the home of Japanese culture. It has seen the development of the art of building wooden houses, of religious architecture and of the different types of garden. These gardens have influenced the idea of balance in gardens worldwide, and we enjoy the pleasures of such a garden at UNESCO.

At its meeting here in this country, the Intergovernmental Committee will have an opportunity to draw on the creativity of people here, as it examines methods and mechanisms for recommendation to the Parties to the Convention. The starting point must be the determination that you, the Members of the Intergovernmental Committee, have shown in completing the task begun through the 1972 Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage and in building on the ongoing efforts initiated by His Excellency Mr Koïchiro Matsuura, Director-General of UNESCO, who has been very keen to pay close attention to the intangible heritage and to save it from extinction. I should not forget to draw attention to the Government of Japan's material and moral support for the steps that had been taken with a view to the adoption of the Convention. I would like to pay tribute to H.E. Mr Bedjaoui and the Algerian Government who hosted the first session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Ladies and gentlemen,

As a result of all of those efforts, there is now greater awareness of the need for this Convention. For the safeguarding of the heritage of all peoples, cultures and civilizations means protecting identity, ensuring equality, preventing the extinction of cultures of marginalized and excluded societies. It means ensuring participation in public life and cultural endeavour, in spiritual practice and in the dialogue between the components of each society and among different societies and cultures. It means ensuring acceptance of diversity, tolerance and mutual understanding among human beings. The importance of the intangible heritage is unmeasurable: it is a factor of diversity and leads to sustainable development. It must be remembered that when societies grasp the significance of the intangible heritage, they draw closer together.

Ladies and gentlemen,

One of the greatest dangers facing the intangible cultural heritage as the effects of globalization spread rapidly is the decline in numbers of those who practise traditional crafts, music and dance. Dance was the first art form to appear among humans: through dance ancient peoples celebrated triumphs and victories. Therefore, one of the most important means of preserving this heritage is to ensure that those who bear it pass on what they know to the next generations. In the words of the author Thomas Scott, "Great leaders in ideas are those who create a new spirit among their followers."

It is also necessary for everyone to be convinced that the intangible heritage cannot be effectively safeguarded unless those people who are connected with it assume responsibility for safeguarding it themselves as part of their lives. Similarly, generous efforts to make our societies aware of their historical responsibilities in order to further creativity, dialogue and solidarity constitute a noble humanitarian task, a task that requires political will to integrate it into the development process.

Distinguished audience,

The intangible heritage is one of the pleasures of life. One of its most important components is music: as the musician Walter Barter put it, “All of the arts yearn to embrace music.” Musical rhythm is a language invented by human beings to express their perception of the rhythms implicit in their passions, feelings and impressions, a perception that matures and develops through the medium that they invent and enhance. Through that medium they interact with their world; they sense its importance and feel the need to participate in safeguarding it and to enjoy it as part of their life, as a source of their social and spiritual development.

As I express thanks to UNESCO and the Japanese Government for the kind invitation to attend the session, I feel proud to be with you today. I should like to express my gratitude for your attention, your deep generosity and your authentic Japanese hospitality. I should like to commend in particular the organizers in Japan, the National Commission of Japan to UNESCO, the Permanent Delegation of Japan to UNESCO, my friend Ambassador Kondo and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Section at UNESCO for facilitating my task.

I shall conclude with the words of a sweet, soulful Japanese song, entitled *Kyo No Hi Wa Sayonara*:

May we be friends forever,
Keeping to the path of hope.
Keep the promise of our friendship forever –
Goodbye for now, until we meet again, I hope.

Arigato (Thank you).