

The Seoul Vision for the Future of Safeguarding Living Heritage for Sustainable Development and Peace

The Seoul Global Meeting
20th Anniversary Celebration of the

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

Unleashing the power of living heritage for sustainable development and peace

25-26 July 2023

On the 20th anniversary of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, a global meeting was held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, on 25-26 July 2023. The meeting brought together representatives of the States Parties to the Convention, thinkers, living heritage holders, experts, civil society representatives and young people, some of whom were present in Seoul and others who participated online. Under the theme “Unleashing the power of living heritage for sustainable development and peace,” the meeting celebrated achievements of twenty years of implementing the Convention and outlined a vision for its future direction. Four thematic panels explored living heritage in relation to (i) sustainable livelihoods, (ii) the natural world, (iii) quality education and (iv) the digital environment.

The event was hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Korea (MOFA) and the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea (CHA) in collaboration with UNESCO and the International Information and Networking Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific Region under the auspices of UNESCO (ICHCAP) and the Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation (CHF).

Context and achievements

- In twenty years of implementation, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage has significantly broadened the concept of cultural heritage to include practices, expressions and knowledge systems that are transmitted from generation to generation. Two decades after its adoption in 2003, the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, with 181 States Parties, 676 elements inscribed in the Lists of the Convention, and 217 accredited NGOs, has achieved one of its major objectives: to raise awareness of the importance of safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, increasing its visibility at the international level, and placing living heritage communities at the heart of safeguarding cultural heritage.
- More so, while twenty years ago only a handful of countries had integrated intangible cultural heritage – or ‘living heritage’ - in their policies, today we can see that the Convention has become a key reference almost universally for its States Parties in setting up institutions and implementing public policies and laws, as evidenced through periodic reports on the implementation of the Convention at the national level.
- While this is an extraordinary achievement, a lot remains to be done. Living heritage around the world is still under threat, be it due to demographic shifts, economic pressures, rapid technological developments, loss of languages, environmental degradation, pandemics or changing values and attitudes. Many of these threats undermine the safeguarding and

transmission of living heritage itself by weakening community cohesion, eliminating the spaces for transmission and learning, often leading to disempowerment, and, ultimately, triggering a reduction in cultural diversity and a sense of alienation.

- Humanity continues to face major challenges that are closely linked to these threats to living heritage. Large sections of the world's population lack sustainable livelihoods, the effects of climate change are increasingly apparent, education systems are struggling to meet the real needs of learners, hate speech in the form of xenophobia, racism and other types of intolerance are fuelled by online platforms, conflicts around the world continue to claim many lives, and migration and rapid urbanization are constantly disrupting and reorganizing social structures. The digital era has far-reaching implications for contemporary ways of learning, working, interacting, and living together, also affecting the transmission and the expression of living cultural heritage.
- These global challenges are pressing, and they call for immediate action. We must place living heritage and the values on which it is based at the heart of national and international agendas for sustainable development, for collective action, based on a sense of solidarity across humanity and recognizing that our diversity is our strength.

Our vision: Unleashing the power of living heritage for sustainable development and peace

- Now is the time to unleash the power of living heritage for ensuring sustainable development and peace for enhancing solidarity and inclusion, for preserving biodiversity and oceans, and for responding to health, social and economic crises. Now is the time to recognize culture as a global public good, as underlined in the MONDIACULT Declaration adopted by 150 States at the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, and, with it, acknowledge the importance of living heritage cutting across every dimension of sustainability. Now is the time for culture, including living heritage, to be recognized not only as a fundamental right, but also as a key pillar of sustainability on its own.
- We recall that intangible cultural heritage is created and recreated by communities who practice and transmit it and is inseparable from their social, cultural, and economic lives. Over the next 20 years, we must bring to the forefront the voices of the community members, for them to convey and share contextually relevant solutions and strengthen their active participation at national and international levels. This will help ensure that sustainable development agendas truly harness the power of living heritage to achieve our common goals.
- We recognize that the intersection between living heritage and economic development is complex and multifaceted (SDG 2, 5, 8, 11), and that economic activity can have both positive and negative effects on living heritage safeguarding, as well as on the livelihoods of practitioners and communities. The knowledge, skills, and practices which local communities have maintained, transmitted, and enhanced over generations, has the potential to provide livelihoods for many people and can generate revenue and decent work, including for people of different ages and genders, and indigenous peoples.
- We reaffirm the central role that living heritage can play in tackling the pressing global environmental challenges facing our lives and the planet, in not only providing time-tested solutions, but in shaping and reaffirming our relationship to the natural world. Living heritage expressions foster values of respect, custodianship and reciprocity towards nature and promote awareness and understanding of the diverse value systems and concepts that local communities have in relation to the natural world.

- We recognize that living heritage is a powerful resource we can harness to address the current global learning crisis, where education systems struggle to meet the expectations and needs of the next generation. Living heritage can make a significant contribution to improving the quality and relevance of education, fostering appreciation for cultural diversity and contributing to education for peace, global citizenship and sustainable development.
- We acknowledge the ground-breaking impact of digital technologies on people's lives and their intangible cultural heritage, both posing new threats and providing new opportunities for its continued transmission to future generations. We underline that in this regard, addressing rights and ethics issues in the changing digital space is important. We also believe that as hate speech and expressions of racism and xenophobia circulate rapidly on the Internet, the power of living heritage to foster respect for diversity and celebrate differences can be and should be harnessed as a countering force connecting rather than dividing people around the globe.
- We are convinced that intangible cultural heritage safeguarding needs to engage all stakeholders and policy areas – within and beyond the culture sector. This involves state authorities, local governments, civil society organizations, international organizations, and the private sector. Joint action and tailored responses can considerably enhance the present and the future of living heritage safeguarding and ensure that it is leveraged for improving people's lives.
- In the next 20 years, we envision that, with renewed efforts and joint action from all stakeholders, the role of intangible cultural heritage as a driver of sustainable development will be firmly established and fully integrated into national development plans, policies and programmes at all levels, recognizing at the same time the interdependence between the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage and sustainable development, peace and human security.

Future action

To achieve this vision, we must:

- foster opportunities for innovative initiatives for living heritage safeguarding, sustainable development and peace.
- support transmission through the emergence of young leadership and showcase their voices in local, national, and international arenas.
- renew our commitment to pursue ambitious capacity building oriented towards community driven sustainable development strategies that mainstream the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, ensuring that no one is left behind.
- encourage spaces for dialogue and cooperation between all stakeholders, bringing communities, States, NGOs and international organizations together to share experiences and co-design policies and programmes, both within and beyond the cultural sector.
- promote transversal approaches to policy making, building on existing synergies between UNESCO's instruments and programmes, to fully realize the potential of intangible cultural heritage as an enabler of inclusive social and economic development and environmental sustainability, while also recognizing their interdependence with peace and human security.
- implement heritage-sensitive economic approaches and safeguarding measures that harness living heritage for improving the sustainable livelihoods of communities, while fostering

continued practice and transmission of their cultural heritage in a meaningful and appropriate way.

- integrate the safeguarding of living heritage into policies and programmes for creative industries and provide capacity building for living heritage practitioners (crafts, artistic performance, etc.), allowing the communities to harness their living heritage towards sustaining their livelihoods.
- integrate living heritage safeguarding into national plans and strategies for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, applying community-based approaches.
- support the development and strengthening of monitoring mechanisms and instruments, at national, regional and international levels, to generate new data on the contribution of living heritage to the protection of biodiversity, reduction of disaster risk and mitigation of climate change impacts, ensuring the fair and equitable sharing of benefits for the communities, groups and individuals concerned.
- anchor living heritage firmly in education and culture policies and strategies at all levels, train teachers and educators on how to work with communities on the integration of their living heritage into their programmes, and incorporate living heritage in formal education curricula, programmes and approaches in schools and teacher-training institutions, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and in non-formal education programmes, including in museums, cultural centres and community learning centres.
- explore the potential of digital technologies for stronger representation of living heritage communities in the digital environment as well as for connecting them across the globe so that they can share their concerns, aspirations, and experiences in safeguarding their living cultural heritage, hand in hand with civil society and young people, while promoting ethical principles for avoiding an increased bias in the digital environment, misappropriation and misrepresentation of living heritage. This will help foster respect for diversity and celebrate differences as a countering force to hate speech and expressions of racism and xenophobia that are circulating rapidly on the Internet.
- Promote the important role that living heritage and its safeguarding can play to combat gender-based discrimination, and to create common spaces for dialogue on how best to achieve a gender-inclusive future and enhance understanding of gender and its complexities.
- improve the availability and dissemination of data and knowledge on the contribution of living heritage to sustainable development, both at the national and international levels, building on existing mechanisms of the Convention, notably the Overall results framework for the Convention and its periodic reporting mechanism.
- continue strengthening the 2003 Convention, with a view to supporting countries in their safeguarding efforts, ensuring greater equity, geographical balance and representation across all regions and maintaining the requirements of compatibility with existing international human rights instruments, sustainable development and mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals.