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Synergy of UNESCO heritage programmes and future development perspectives

Speech

Extended Sitting

***of the Saeima Education, Culture and Science Committee of the Republic of
Latvia and the Assembly of Latvian National Commission for UNESCO***

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Madame Chairperson of the Saeima Education, Culture and Science Committee of the Republic of Latvia,

Madame Secretary-General of the Latvian National Commission for UNESCO,

Distinguished members of the Saeima,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to express my profound gratitude to the Government of Latvia for the invitation to attend this year's Nationwide Song and Dance Celebration. I am also honoured to be given the opportunity to speak with the Saeima Education, Culture and Science Committee of the Republic of Latvia and the Assembly of Latvian National Commission for UNESCO today.

For this afternoon, I am pleased to discuss with you the synergy of UNESCO's heritage initiatives and future development perspectives. At the start, it is important to point out that UNESCO's heritage programmes cover all aspects of tangible heritage and intangible heritage, and have been built around six conventions, ten recommendations and two declarations. Of the six conventions, four are related to tangible heritage, namely the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property, the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and the 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage. As for intangible heritage, this is covered under the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and related to the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. Moreover, all ten recommendations and two declarations are largely concerned with tangible heritage. However, it is evident that the intangible cultural heritage convention is the fastest growing convention today. Furthermore, it should be noted that there is a very high level of synergy between tangible and intangible heritage, and I will come back to this point later.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before discussing the synergy of these instruments, I would like to very briefly position them within the context of international law. In this regard, Article 27 (1) of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights states that "everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits." In fact, this provision was included partly because of pressure from UNESCO at the time the Declaration was being considered. Furthermore, Article 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states that treaty parties "recognize the right of everyone:

(a) to take part in cultural life,” and Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that:

“In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.”

Moreover, it is important to note that Article 1 of both Covenants provides that:

“All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.”

It is clear that international human rights standards set out a range of obligations on nation states to protect cultural heritage and ensure its accessibility to all their citizens. In this sense, UNESCO’s heritage conventions are legally binding international instruments reinforcing these obligations, and UNESCO’s heritage programmes represent concrete actions to realize these cultural rights. This is a crucial characteristic of UNESCO’s heritage initiatives since they provide Member States with workable modalities to operationalize their international human rights obligations.

Distinguished Colleagues,

There are clearly synergistic overlaps in the substance of the 1954, 1970, 1972 and 2003 conventions covering tangible and intangible heritage. These conventions require the establishment of heritage inventories or registers containing entries within their respective areas. While nominations to these lists are only open to State Parties to the conventions, for documentary heritage under the Memory of the World Programme, nominations are open to individuals, institutions and Member States. Similarly, all final decisions are taken by State Parties in the conventions, as opposed to a panel of independent experts for documentary heritage under the Memory of the World Programme.

Due to the binding nature of these conventions, State Parties are obliged to implement measures to ensure protection and/or conservation of the tangible heritage properties or intangible cultural heritage in the registers of the respective conventions. This obligation implies that State Parties, as far as possible, should invest resources to build institutional and legal frameworks for this purpose, as well as to build the necessary capacities through training and education programmes. In contrast, no such obligation is foreseen for documentary heritage through the Memory of the World international register. However, there is an implied commitment by the respective custodians to protect listed documentary heritage products. Nevertheless it is important to note that these custodians tend to put their own

interpretation on obligations in this regard, and the levels of support are by no means constant from one custodian to another.

A brief examination of the substantive scope of the tangible heritage conventions shows that protection of documentary heritage with cultural value is already currently covered in conflict situations and in illicit trafficking of such heritage. In terms of the intangible cultural heritage convention, while vital in establishing the validity of State Parties' claim to long term practise of the heritage, it is still not very clear whether documentary heritage could be an associated element. With regards to tangible and immovable cultural heritage, UNESCO's programme is focused only on sites, buildings and monuments, so documentary heritage is not supported despite the value which this heritage has in validating the historical importance of both building and builder. It is therefore clear that documents with heritage significance could have potential roles in the assessment and as conservation outcomes of both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage programmes, and are thus usually accorded some value by the State Parties seeking authentication.

With regards to community participation, it should be noted that the Memory of the World Programme provides a robust modality for communities to initiate and implement documentary heritage measures. Within the intangible cultural heritage programme, the applicable traditional knowledge, practice or expressions must be identified by the community. In contrast, community was only added to the national framework for the management of world heritage sites in 2007, but it does not currently play a critical role in the decision to inscribe a particular site.

Furthermore the 1978 Recommendation for the Protection of Movable Cultural Property, the 1980 Recommendation for the Safeguarding and Preservation of Moving Images, and the 1989 Recommendation on the Safeguarding of Traditional Culture and Folklore all contain elements that are directly relevant to the protection and preservation of documentary heritage. In addition, the 2003 UNESCO Declaration concerning the Intentional Destruction of Cultural Heritage and the 2003 Charter on the Preservation of Digital Heritage outline persuasive principles relevant to the protection of documentary heritage

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As already mentioned, a clear synergy between documentary and tangible heritage programmes is the protection afforded to documentary heritage with cultural value in armed conflicts and from illicit trafficking. This is important because it implies that State Parties to the 1954 and 1970 conventions can already access technical and financial assistance through these conventions or from UNESCO to protect documentary heritage in such situations. In these contexts, the Director-General is also free to mobilize additional resources with a global call to all those who wish to support, as has been done recently with the Timbuktu Archives under threat in Mali. Another clear synergy is the applicability of the three recommendations and two declarations mentioned previously. These provide a sound basis for the protection

and preservation of certain types of documentary heritage by UNESCO Member States and the international community as a whole.

Although the 1972 convention does not apply to documentary heritage, the use of information sources to authenticate the outstanding universal value of monuments, buildings and sites could be considered of relevance in the context of the Memory of the World, alongside key historical monuments on the World Heritage List, or at the very least, in the regional or national registers. For example, the inscription of the Australian Convict Sites onto the World Heritage List was largely made possible by the availability of historical documentary sources related both to the philosophy and construction of those sites. Furthermore, part of the conservation measures under this convention is the documentation, interpretation and presentation of the heritage site, the products of which could have documentary heritage significance. These two elements seem to signal that there is a potential for integrating documentary heritage considerations into the associated processes of the World Heritage programme.

As for intangible cultural heritage, further clarification is needed to determine whether documentary products could be an input to or become an associated element of intangible cultural heritage. This point of clarification, if positive, should also lead to further clarification on whether State Parties could then request for technical and financial assistance under the 2003 Convention to help preserve and protect documentary heritage items associated with listed intangible cultural heritage. The potential synergy here is to provide access to the established fund for documentary heritage preservation, while at the same time, reinforcing the preservation and conservation of the related intangible cultural heritage. Similar to tangible heritage, there is also a potential for integrating documentary heritage considerations into the associated processes of the intangible heritage programme through the types of authentication documents provided, and the outcomes of conservation efforts.

After examining the modalities of the tangible and intangible heritage programmes, it is clear that there is a need to reinforce the Memory of the World Programme's ability to strengthen institutional, legal, technical and capacity building for Member States and other stakeholders to protect documentary heritage.

Dear Colleagues,

I would now like to come back to the synergy between UNESCO's tangible and intangible heritage programmes. Here, I would like to quote from Professor Ned Kaufman's paper in volume 8 of the *International Journal of Intangible Heritage*, published this year. Professor Kaufman stated that:

“The regrettable split between tangible and intangible heritage specialisations should be brought to an end. Just as many (tangible) places owe their importance to intangible values, so too many aspects of intangible heritage are grounded in specific places and cannot survive without them. Yet UNESCO's *Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage* shows little

interest in places, and national and local conservation policies are generally ineffective at safeguarding the intangible values of places. There is a compelling need for policies that do so. To develop them, heritage experts will need to look beyond the kinds of cultural manifestations favoured by tourism and focus instead on ordinary, everyday places. Paying attention to the narratives expressed through people's customs, stories, and insights into the psychological bonds that people form with these places and that, with time, come to define their heritage values (...) Responsibility for tangible and intangible heritage must be brought together within the same agencies."

The ideas outlined by Professor Kaufman provide a sound starting point for establishing synergy between UNESCO's tangible and intangible heritage programmes. Within the Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, criterion (vi), one of ten possible criteria for evaluating the Outstanding Universal Value of nominated properties state that a property should "be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance." This criterion is directly referring to intangible cultural heritage as a valid point of evaluation for potential World Heritage sites, and opens the door for enhanced synergy between the tangible, intangible *and* documentary heritage programmes of UNESCO.

In fact, this connection is crucial as we explore modalities for meeting the challenges of sustainable development in the coming decades. Culture is the ever-evolving manifestation of the spirit of a community, giving it purpose and identity as a living collective organism. The sustainable development of any community must therefore endeavour to preserve the process of cultural transmission in parallel with material progress to ensure that the spirit of the community survives. If the development intervention were to abruptly diminish or destroy the cultural transmission of its intended beneficiaries, instead of allowing it to evolve as a learning process based on new realities, the community could experience an identity crisis that would threaten to tear it apart from the inside out. This has been seen numerous times in the development of many indigenous populations, both in developed and developing countries. This form of unsustainable development eventually leads to the creation of a consumption-based community that is void of any cultural reference of its own.

When we consider the economic development of communities in and around World Heritage sites, keeping in mind that these sites are the physical and natural manifestation of the cultural identities of these communities, we must exercise the precautionary principle judiciously in order to ensure that more good than harm is achieved. The sustainable development of World Heritage sites must be careful to preserve the Outstanding Universal Value of these properties. It should incorporate the living communities in and around the sites, leveraging the intangible cultural heritage of these communities to further enhance and strengthen the goals their

development. The Consultative Expert Meeting on World Heritage and Sustainable Development held in Ouro Preto, Brazil, stated that:

“The concept of heritage is indeed fundamental to the logic of sustainable development as heritage results from the dynamic and continuous relationship between communities and their environment and reflects what people value to sustain and improve their quality of life.”

The meeting also pointed out that:

“With regard to cultural heritage, in particular, we consider that this should be understood as the result of a continuing historical process, where new developments should not necessarily be considered as a threat, but also for their potential to sustain the cultural value of the property and contribute to the creation of new heritage.”

In short, sustainable development of World Heritage sites is achievable if and when local communities are integrated as the primary agents driving the development process, while protecting the integrity of these sites.

This also means that the development of tourism at World Heritage sites should be fully based on community engagement. This would ensure that the interpretations of Outstanding Universal Values of these sites through living intangible cultural heritage are strengthened, expanded, and evolved over time, thus preserving the links and relevance of these sites to the contemporary life of local communities. This is one of the core principles of sustainable tourism at World Heritage sites. Traditional trades at these sites should be preserved and encouraged to grow – training or apprenticeship in these trades should be promoted so that endangered skills are transmitted to the younger generation. Traditional celebrations or festivals should be studied for their linkages to the World Heritage sites to raise public awareness and to facilitate continuous learning and transformation of the interpretations of these sites. The site at Axum, Ethiopia, springs to mind where members of the Ethiopian Orthodox community regularly celebrate various saints’ days in the context of pre-Christian Axum obelisks which are at the heart of this World Heritage property.

These critical steps will create a social, cultural and economic environment conducive to the emergence, evolution and sustainability of cultural industries that are unique within the local market, and that will be ideally poised to penetrate the international arena. If we are to speak in purely economic terms, the comparative advantage offered by World Heritage sites is not to transpose international brands to these sites, but to use them as platforms to launch unique brands based on a diversity of cultural products that are able to compete in their own right at the international level. The success of sustainable tourism has the potential to create long-term and perpetually adapting sources of wealth for local communities, and for the countries where these sites are located. It is perhaps the most appropriate form of sustainable development at World Heritage sites. In this way, the tangible and intangible heritage programmes

will be able to mutually reinforce each other, through synergy in action and in purpose.

One of the most impressive examples of this approach is found in the conservation and sustainable development project for the World Heritage site of Prasat Beng Mealea in Siem Reap, Cambodia. By linking local communities with the opportunities created by tourism, this project developed a coherent set of policies and procedures to enable the Government of Cambodia to conserve both the tangible and intangible values of Angkor, improve governance and alleviate poverty. Positive outcomes from this initiative include the revival of certain traditional occupations, the emergence of unique cultural industries and products, and the creation of long-term sustainable employment for local communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the highest level, a synergy could be achieved across the tangible, intangible and documentary heritage programmes through the development of a methodology for an integrated evaluation of these types of heritage. The feasibility, desirability and potential modality of this integrated approach would have to be further studied by UNESCO. However, such a model should streamline the implementation and management of State Parties' obligations under UNESCO's cultural heritage conventions, and should result in time and cost savings over the long-term. This synergy is very much desired as Member States' administrative costs related to the conventions are very high, and could pose a real challenge for many developing and developed countries alike.

Similarly, during this time of financial austerity, UNESCO is also evaluating its internal processes to achieve further synergy and streamlining in the management of its heritage conventions. This is necessary because of the heavy administrative costs, and is vital to establish a strategic roadmap for the future of UNESCO's actions in order to ensure that it is able to continue addressing emerging issues with regards to heritage protection and promotion as well as with regards to sustainable development.

In the 40 years of World Heritage Convention, the 20 years of the Memory of the World Programme, and the 10 years of the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, experience has shown that there is a growing demand for development of capacity building, public advocacy and awareness raising initiatives within Member States. There have also been a growing number of academic programmes dealing with cultural and documentary heritage. By ensuring that these initiatives and academic programmes address the conjunction between tangible, intangible and documentary heritage, thus creating cross-disciplinary expertise, Member States are able to take a positive step towards ensuring that the proper skills are available within their jurisdiction to sustainably manage and develop their activities under UNESCO's heritage programmes.

Distinguished Colleagues,

I hope that I have been able to present some interesting and stimulating perspectives on UNESCO's heritage programmes this afternoon, and I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak with you, and for your kind attention.

Thank you.