

**Opening Address
By Ms Françoise Rivière
UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture**

On the occasion of the

**First Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection
and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions**

**Ottawa, Canada
Government Conference Centre**

10 December 2007

Mr President of the General Conference,

Mr Chairman of the Executive Board,

Honourable Minister of Canadian Heritage, Status of Women and Official Languages,

Honourable Minister of Culture, Communications and Status of Women in Quebec,

Honourable Minister of Culture of Brazil,

Ladies and Gentlemen heads of delegations,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The First Intergovernmental Committee, which opens today, barely six months after the First Conference of Parties, marks the concrete beginning of efforts to implement the Convention. It is no longer time to reflect or debate. It is time to act. The first task is therefore to draw up a timetable and develop a method which, in accordance with the resolutions of the First Conference of Parties, would present ways to make this Convention operational at its second session in June 2009, without creating frustrations or disappointing the immense expectations.

But first, allow me to begin with the customary acknowledgements. I would like to thank Canada for its generous hospitality, shown today in

Ottawa and in Quebec where the meeting of the World Heritage Committee will take place.

My thanks also go to all the Parties that firmly expressed their political will to bring the Convention to life during the last General Conference. The presence here of an important number of representatives of the Parties testifies once again to their interest and the active role they intend to play in its implementation. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the observer Member States, intergovernmental organizations and non-governmental organizations: their interest is proof of an endless enthusiasm and dynamism. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Mr George N. Anastassopoulos, the President of the General Conference, and Mr Yai, the Chairman of the Executive Board, whose presence underscores the importance the Organization attaches to this Convention and its First Intergovernmental Committee.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which was adopted by the 33rd General Conference of UNESCO in October 2005 and entered into force on 18 March 2007, now counts 76 Parties: 75 States and the European

Community as a Regional Economic Integration Organization. Let me remind you that six months ago, at the First Conference of the Parties, there were only 57. Such speed is unprecedented for standard-setting instruments in the field of culture.

I am delighted to note that the Asia-Pacific region now counts seven Parties (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Mongolia, New Zealand and Viet Nam) and that five Arab States (Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and Tunisia) have ratified the Convention. The imbalance in the geographical distribution that was of such much concern to us in June is in currently being corrected.

The pace of ratifications is far from slowing down. In fact, some fifteen Member States representing all UNESCO electoral groups have announced that they have begun and, in some cases, completed their internal ratification process. I am happy to announce that the United Kingdom has deposited its ratification instrument on 7 December.

This result reflects the efforts of the entire international community, and more specifically the Organisation internationale de la francophonie and its Secretary-General, Mr Abdou Diouf, the International Network on Cultural Policy as well as different civil society coalitions.

If the movement is underway, we must continue to lend it our support. The legitimacy of any instrument is indeed linked to the number of ratifications representing all regions of the world. Moreover, international solidarity, which is a major aspect of this Convention, cannot be meaningful without a balanced geographic representation of the Parties.

The rapid ratification of the text is obviously a clear signal from the international community. The quality of your work will be another.

I shall not dwell on the First Session of the Conference of Parties or on its success as demonstrated by the high number of participants – over 400 – and the consensual atmosphere that prevailed. I would simply like to thank its Chairperson, Professor Asmal. Without him, we would not be here today, at this crossroads, on the eve of formulating the operational guidelines of this new instrument.

At its First Session, the Conference adopted two resolutions which will guide your work until its next session in June 2009. The first is the resolution whereby the Conference requires the Committee to submit proposals concerning the development of operational guidelines, giving priority attention to the provisions of Articles 7, 8 and 11 to 17 of the Convention. The second is the resolution regarding Article 18. These articles concern measures that should be taken for the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, international cooperation, the role of civil

society and also on the use of the resources of the International Fund for the Cultural Diversity. Your objective is clear: to translate these articles into pragmatic terms, through a transversal and thorough reading of the Convention, in order to prepare specific operational guidelines which will allow the spirit and letter of the founding text to take real effect.

Your agenda is therefore ambitious. First, you must elect your Chairperson and Bureau and adopt your Rules of Procedure. Then follows a review of four substantive documents. They have been designed to initiate reflection and determine a roadmap that includes a timetable and specifies the working methods for each one of them.

In line with the agenda, the **first** document concerns the structure and content of the operational guidelines for the implementation and application of the provisions of the Convention. It thus represents a draft “Table of contents”, a non-exhaustive list of working methods that the Committee could adopt accordingly for each chapter. The agenda also calls for the adoption of a roadmap, including a timetable.

The **second** document is devoted to international cooperation, which is a fundamental pillar of the Convention. At this stage, you will review Articles 12, 13, 15 and 16. Two articles – 15 and 16 – pave the way for particularly innovative modalities of collaboration. Article 15 refers to the development of partnerships between the public sector, the private

sector and not-for-profit organizations; Article 16 concerns preferential treatment for developing countries. This document calls on the Committee to conduct an initial exchange of ideas. In light of your discussions, draft texts concerning these articles will be prepared for review and discussion at your next meeting, which the Director-General proposes to hold from 24 to 27 June 2008 at UNESCO Headquarters.

The **third** document is devoted to civil society. It is complemented by an information document, which provides definitions and explains the functions and roles of civil society. In fact, one of the paradoxes of this Convention is that it addresses the States but requires a very active involvement of civil society for its implementation. How can we define civil society, particularly in the field of culture, when we do not yet have an accurate mapping of what it is? How can we organize its contribution to the actions implemented by States? These are some of the issues which should be directly addressed.

Finally, and this will be the subject of the **fourth** document, you will have to consider the issue of the International Fund for Cultural Diversity. As you know, this Fund is intended for Parties from developing countries to strengthen their cultural industries. Its resources comprise voluntary contributions from the Parties. A contribution has already been made by Andorra, another has been pledged (Belgium – the French Community

and the Walloon region) and several others were promised during the Conference of Parties (Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Germany, France, India, Italy, Jamaica, Mexico, Monaco, South Africa, Spain, St Lucia and Uruguay). This fund is a strategic instrument that should support all the links in the chain, from creation through production, distribution, dissemination and access to enjoyment of cultural expressions. The document which is presented to you provides draft guidelines for the **use** of the resources of the Fund. It was drawn up with due consideration for Article 14, a flagship provision for international cooperation. These are draft guidelines: once again, based on your discussions, a new document will be submitted at your next meeting, which will focus on the **modalities** governing the use of the resources of the fund.

You will have noted that the draft decisions that have been submitted to you do not propose to hold an expert meeting prior to your next session. The time we have been given is limited, as is the staffing of the Secretariat of the Convention. The work to be completed is immense; it is also urgent.

I would therefore like to appeal for associate or national experts to be seconded to the section that ensures the Secretariat of the Convention. The most pressing needs concern operational projects aimed at fostering

the emergence of an enabling environment for cultural industries through partnerships that enable an exchange of knowledge and best practices, with respect for the equal dignity of cultures, which is a governing principle of the Convention.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, finally, to stress once again the ambitious scope of the Convention and to encourage you to be inspired by the text while bearing in mind its purpose. The Preamble states that “cultural activities, goods and services have both an economic and a cultural nature, because they convey identities, values and meanings, and must therefore not be treated as solely having commercial value”. International cooperation – a fundamental instrument to promote the emergence of cultural industries and the circulation of goods and services in developing countries – must contribute to poverty eradication. Furthermore, to ensure that development is sustainable, we must succeed in integrating culture into development policies. This is the ultimate goal of the Convention: to strengthen measures and cultural policies, and encourage public debate to devise strategies that enable culture to be integrated into development policies.

By means of periodic reports, the Convention will also allow us to measure diversity, assess its weaknesses and its progress, and follow the contours and dynamics of social change within the Parties, thus revealing cultural diversity within the territories of State Parties. The objective we must pursue is to promote interactions among groups that consider themselves to belong to different cultures so as not to fix narrow perceptions and experiences of individual identities. Raising young people's awareness of the diversity of cultural expressions is essential: it will allow their creativity to fuel the growth of the cultural industries. The struggle for cultural diversity does not belong to one particular cause or one particular group; it is universal. This Convention has rightly recognized the role of culture in development. We should be aware that the Convention will only be an effective pillar of global governance if the diversity of the world is recognized and international solidarity truly asserts itself.

We must remain open to the world and be attentive to diversity. It is for this reason that on 21 May 2008 UNESCO will celebrate worldwide, in a festive and stimulating manner, the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. It will highlight the conceptual premises of the Convention, engaging artists from all regions in order to illustrate the need to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bringing this Convention to life is a great and difficult mission for the Parties and for UNESCO. I have no doubts that this first meeting of the Committee will live up to the high expectations anticipated by all.

Thank you.