June 15, 2018

Dear Ms. Azoulay,

Located on the crossroad of civilizations, Armenia for centuries has had a unique opportunity of multicultural and religious interaction thus contributing effectively to its culture and enriching the vivid cultural heritage of the region. Such interconnection of history, culture and traditions undoubtedly pave the ground for mutually beneficial collaboration, economic cooperation and successful development of the region. Unfortunately, the perception of this indisputable fact is not being reciprocated by all our neighbours.

Contrary to the purpose and the spirit of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, Azerbaijan still continues politicizing this framework and using it to present its unlimited and groundless claims for every piece of history and culture in the region, despite being a young country that was formed in 1918. Consequently Armenia's each nomination for the inscription in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity becomes a subject of unjustified criticism by Azerbaijan and future source for their plagiarized nominations.

The most recent and vivid example of Azerbaijan’s non constructive and envious stance was its attitude towards the nomination “Kochari, traditional group dance” and its failed attempts to block the inscription of Armenian nomination on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2017.

Following the submission of the nomination “Kochari, traditional group dance” by Armenia back in 2014 and consideration by the Committee in 2015 (later inscribed in 2017), a follow-up action by Azerbaijan was the submission of a “replica” nomination “Yalli (Kochari, Tenzere), traditional group dances of Nakhchivan” in 2016 for the inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

The title of “Yalli (Kochari, Tenzere), traditional group dances of Nakhchivan” nomination is a clear example of provocation: “Kochari” and “Tenzere” are intentionally mentioned in the title though there are more than 60 types of “Yalli” as stated.

With reference to B3, the types of Yalli cannot be considered other names of the element as stated: they are merely varieties of Yalli dances.

Ms. Audrey AZOULAY
Director-General
UNESCO
Paris
The information included in the “Yalli (Kochari, Tenzere), traditional group dances of Nakhchivan” nomination file is not sufficient to determine whether U1, U2 and U4 criteria for inscription on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding are satisfied.

It should be mentioned that, based on historical sources and data, group dances had been in wide and diverse practice among the Armenian, Kurdish and Yazidi communities in Nakhijevan until the middle of the 20th century.

Referring to the arguments in the nomination file (page 5), gradual decrease in the number of practitioners resulted from migration starting from the middle of the 20th century, but the State Party failed to pay due attention to those communities which no longer exist in the particular region and mention that main community practising the element have been forced to flee the autonomous region since the middle of the 20th century. Significant demographic shift, in particular forced migration of the Armenian community is the reason for the decrease in the number of practitioners. Number of Armenians shifted from the number of more than 40% of the whole population at the beginning of the 20th century to 6.7% in 1959, and finally to 1% in 1988-1989.

Although the tradition of practising group dances is widely shared by many countries in the world, the culture of dancing, e.g. Kochari in Armenia with all its components - social function, techniques, meaning and variety of cultural expressions, differs considerably from similar ones.

Azerbaijan’s tactics was similarly malicious with regards to the inscription of the Armenian nomination “Lavash, the preparation, meaning and appearance of traditional bread as an expression of culture in Armenia” on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage back in 2014.

Unsurprisingly, a “replica” nomination followed, being named “Flatbread making and sharing culture: Lavash, Katyrma, Jupka, Yufka” which was submitted by Azerbaijan, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkey, with the former in a leading role.

Armenia urged the Committee and insisted, when considering this file, to refer to a previous file with the same element, taking into account the Recommendation of the experts of UNESCO concerning the Armenian nomination of 2014 with the purpose “to remain conscious of the element’s larger cultural context in the region”.

The Committee acted rationally when adopting “Flatbread making and sharing culture: Lavash, Katyrma, Jupka, Yufka” nomination in 2016: it referred in its Decision 11.COM 10.B.2 to a 2014 Decision 9.COM 10.3 with regards to the “Lavash, the preparation, meaning and appearance of traditional bread as an expression of culture in Armenia” nomination and “took note that the culture of making and sharing flatbread is shared by communities in the region and beyond”.

In this regard the title of the nomination should be changed as follows: “Yalli, traditional group dances of Nakhchivan”, excluding a mere mention of a specific dance because either all the names of the types should be mentioned or none of them should be specified to avoid discriminatory and biased approach.

We are also confident that the already existing precedent should be applicable to the nomination “Yalli (Kochari, Tenzere), traditional group dances of Nakhchivan” thus making a reference in the corresponding Decision of the Committee this December to the relevant 12.COM 11.B.2 Decision of 2017 with regards to the “Kochari, traditional group dance” nomination, as well as the fact that “the element is practised in the larger cultural context of the region”.
We would highly appreciate your assistance on forwarding this letter to the Evaluation body and the members of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Vahram Kazhoyan
Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary,
Secretary General of the National Commission for UNESCO