CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING
OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Sixteenth session
2021

Nomination file No. 01691
for inscription in 2021 on the Representative List
of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity

A. State(s) Party(ies)

For multinational nominations, States Parties should be listed in the order on which they have mutually agreed.

Mauritania

B. Name of the element

B.1. Name of the element in English or French

Indicate the official name of the element that will appear in published material.

Not to exceed 200 characters

Traditional teaching system of the Mahadras in Mauritania

B.2. Name of the element in the language and script of the community concerned, if applicable

Indicate the official name of the element in the vernacular language corresponding to the official name in English or French (point B.1).

Not to exceed 200 characters

Mahadras

B.3. Other name(s) of the element, if any

In addition to the official name(s) of the element (point B.1), mention alternate name(s), if any, by which the element is known.

La Mahadra; Dudal, in Pulaar; Xaralla, in Soninke; Daara, in Wolof;
C. **Name of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned**

Identify clearly one or several communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned with the nominated element.

Not to exceed 150 words

This system is used by all Mauritanians, and in all regions of the country. Since it is a system of education that was the sole system for centuries, all communities and individuals are concerned, from children studying in it to adults, without any distinction of social status or origin. However, it may be said that the Sheikhs of the Mahadras and the different actors involved in the perpetuation of this system are the most directly concerned.

D. **Geographical location and range of the element**

Provide information on the distribution of the element within the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s), indicating, if possible, the location(s) in which it is centred. Nominations should concentrate on the situation of the element within the territories of the submitting States, while acknowledging the existence of same or similar elements outside their territories. Submitting States should not refer to the viability of such intangible cultural heritage outside their territories or characterize the safeguarding efforts of other States.

Not to exceed 150 words

Today, this educational system is spread throughout the territory of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and over a wider area covering parts of neighbouring countries to the north, east and south.

E. **Contact person for correspondence**

E.1. **Designated contact person**

Provide the name, address and other contact information of a single person responsible for all correspondence concerning the nomination. For multinational nominations, provide complete contact information for one person designated by the States Parties as the main contact person for all correspondence relating to the nomination.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title (Ms/Mr, etc.):</th>
<th>Monsieur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family name:</td>
<td>Salihy</td>
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<td>Nami Mohamed Kaber</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:namisalihy@gmail.com">namisalihy@gmail.com</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

E.2. **Other contact persons (for multinational files only)**

Provide below complete contact information for one person in each submitting State, other than the primary contact person identified above.

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1. **Identification and definition of the element**

For **Criterion R.1**, States shall demonstrate that ‘the element constitutes intangible cultural heritage as defined in Article 2 of the Convention’.

Tick one or more boxes to identify the domain(s) of intangible cultural heritage manifested by the element, which might include one or more of the domains identified in Article 2.2 of the Convention. If you tick ‘other(s)’, specify the domain(s) in brackets.
oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of intangible cultural heritage
✓ social practices, rituals and festive events
✓ knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
✓ traditional craftsmanship

This section should address all the significant features of the element as it exists at present, and should include:

a. an explanation of its social functions and cultural meanings today, within and for its community;
b. the characteristics of the bearers and practitioners of the element;
c. any specific roles, including gender-related ones or categories of persons with special responsibilities towards the element; and
d. the current modes of transmission of the knowledge and skills related to the element.

The Committee should receive sufficient information to determine:

a. that the element is among the ‘practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills — as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith —’;
b. ‘that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize [it] as part of their cultural heritage’;
c. that it is being ‘transmitted from generation to generation, [and] is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history’;
d. that it provides the communities and groups involved with ‘a sense of identity and continuity’; and
e. that it is not incompatible with ‘existing international human rights instruments as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development’.

Overly technical descriptions should be avoided and submitting States should keep in mind that this section must explain the element to readers who have no prior knowledge or direct experience of it. Nomination files need not address in detail the history of the element, or its origin or antiquity.

(i) Provide a brief description of the element that can introduce it to readers who have never seen or experienced it.

Not fewer than 150 or more than 250 words

The traditional education system known as Mahadra is a system whose methods and tools make it possible to provide wide-ranging education, originally adapted to the nomadic lifestyle that prevailed in the country.

It came into existence with the penetration of Islam into Mauritania, with the aim of acquiring and transmitting knowledge under conditions adapted to the way of life and using local products for the production of teaching tools.

It is an educational institution open to all, regardless of age, gender, level or social status.

Its teaching is multidisciplinary (Holy Koran, Prophetic Tradition (Hadith), Islamic Doctrine (Fiqh), Anthologies and poetry, grammar, Arabic language, literature, morals and ethics, history, genealogy, mathematics, astrology, geometry, medicine, linguistics, logic and geography).

The Mahadra, which some have called “the university of the desert”, provides different levels of teaching.

Lessons are written on wooden boards using ink made from a mixture of water, gum Arabic and charcoal, and students are asked to read the lesson repetitively until they can recite it.

Beyond this aspect of a multidisciplinary educational institution, the Mahadra is also a school of life where students get to know each other, learn to respect each other’s differences and develop a spirit of solidarity.

It is also a centre for learning and disseminating noble values: honesty, uprightness, and brotherhood in difference.

Finally, access is free of charge and the teacher’s duties are carried out on a voluntary basis without any payment.
However, the whole community provides the teacher with help and support, each according to their capacity.

(ii) Who are the bearers and practitioners of the element? Are there any specific roles, including gender-related ones or categories of persons with special responsibilities for the practice and transmission of the element? If so, who are they and what are their responsibilities?

Although all Mauritanians are, in one way or another, involved in this education system, the following bearers and practitioners may be mentioned:

- The teacher, the person most directly concerned, who plays an essential role. He constitutes a singular reference, defining, guiding and setting an example of diligence, and is distinguished by his encyclopaedic knowledge. He has an unrivalled capacity to give lessons in all situations to a very large number of students of different levels and specialities. His stamina in his work is remarkable, sometimes taking up the whole day, in any position (he teaches either while walking or sitting down). The students accompany him, moving from one discipline to another, without disturbing his efficiency.

- The members of the teacher’s family and their relations are at the Mahadra’s service.

- Students from all social groups, of all ages and both sexes, represent an essential component of the Mahadra. Students continue their learning at the Mahadra for an average period of between 5 and 7 years, sometimes limited to a longer period, or spend their entire life learning, depending on their choice.

- Women play an important role in traditional education, above all in the initial stage in which they teach children to read and write. Some are also famous and highly learned, so much so that they have their own Mahadras.

- The pupils' parents, whose role is fundamental in the traditional education system.

- All of these people directly or indirectly, individually or collectively, contribute to the roots and perpetuation of this teaching and related knowledge, and to its transmission to future generations.

(iii) How are the knowledge and skills related to the element transmitted today?

- Although the traditional Mahadra teaching system was originally linked to the nomadic way of life, it rapidly adapted to transformations and changes in society.

- As the Mahadra is “a part” of everyone, any human settlement (town, village, camp, etc.) has its mahadra or mahadras which operate alongside or in addition to the modern school.

- The mode of operation has remained the same, i.e. free provision of education and, insofar as necessary, the student’s board and lodging and the teacher’s voluntary work.

- The communities provide the necessary support for the operation of the Mahadra in order to perpetuate it.

- However, in towns in particular, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find volunteer teachers, and communities are sometimes obliged to pay a teacher for their children’s Mahadra.

- But there are still very numerous Mahadras in all regions run by volunteers who welcome students without conditions.

- On the pedagogical level, some Mahadras have introduced subjects into their curricula taught in modern schools, in order to complement the latter and broaden their students’ horizons.

- As far as tools are concerned, although the traditional small board and ink remain present, notebooks and ball-point pens have been introduced into the Mahadra.

- Finally, it should be emphasized that the Mahadra is more present today than in the past, which shows citizens’ attachment to this element of their cultural heritage.

(iv) What social functions and cultural meanings does the element have for its community nowadays?

- Although the traditional Mahadra teaching system was originally linked to the nomadic way of life, it rapidly adapted to transformations and changes in society.

- As the Mahadra is “a part” of everyone, any human settlement (town, village, camp, etc.) has its mahadra or mahadras which operate alongside or in addition to the modern school.

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- However, in towns in particular, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find volunteer teachers, and communities are sometimes obliged to pay a teacher for their children’s Mahadra.

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- Finally, it should be emphasized that the Mahadra is more present today than in the past, which shows citizens’ attachment to this element of their cultural heritage.
The Mahadra is an important part of the social and cultural model and represents a common heritage to all Mauritanians. Its mission can be summed up as follows:

- Providing a space for learning in the religious, linguistic and other fields (history, biographies, general culture, mathematics and logic, etc.);
- Making knowledge an end in itself, a constant and unquestionable value;
- Building a coherent, tolerant, fraternal and cooperative nation, with knowledge as its supreme reference;
- Establishing and popularizing moral values. Interest in original values is growing in the face of the ravages of prevailing globalization and prompts families to send their children to the Mahadra during the holidays, as a complement to the modern school;
- Social integration through the organization of agricultural activities, trade, drawing of water, irrigation, tending animals, etc., student skills that are disappearing;
- Reduction of illiteracy.

The Mahadra is also a place where students of all origins and social status rub shoulders and where a notion of fraternity and equality develops, which are important assets in citizenship and the acceptance of differences.

- Teaching students about tolerance and acceptance of others with their differences
- Consolidation of National Unity through the coexistence of students from all walks of life in an exceptional symbiosis.

These functions are essential, and the Mahadra plays an important role in their fulfilment.

(v) Is there any part of the element that is not compatible with existing international human rights instruments or with the requirement of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, or with sustainable development?

Not fewer than 150 or more than 250 words

The exercises, knowledge and skills pertaining to the Mahadra teaching system are completely in accordance with the spirit of international human rights conventions, the principles of mutual respect between groups and peoples, and the requirements of sustainable development, as stipulated in the sixth section of the binding guidelines of the 2003 UNESCO Convention concerning the preservation of intangible cultural heritage. More than this, the components of the element entrench and promote the general principles of the convention.

The Mahadra - a meeting place for all ages and kinds of individuals, groups from all backgrounds and of all social statuses -, constitutes a free space for communication and the eradication of differences, without any discrimination whatsoever: poor and rich are judged on the same equal standing, eat the same food and share equally in the same learning. It firmly establishes the values of knowledge, through its teachings, and consolidates the bonds between people in Mauritanian society in a climate of mutual respect.

The Mahadra still plays the magnificent role of cultivating fraternity and bringing the different components of the nation closer together.

The Mahadra system and its related exercises do not show any contradictions with human rights conventions. On the contrary, they greatly contribute to multiple aspects pertaining to knowledge of these rights, and work to promote individuals’ intellectual capacities and their positive participation in collective life.

2. Contribution to ensuring visibility and awareness and to encouraging dialogue

For Criterion R.2, the States shall demonstrate that ‘Inscription of the element will contribute to ensuring visibility and awareness of the significance of the intangible cultural heritage and to encouraging dialogue, thus reflecting cultural diversity worldwide and testifying to human creativity’. This criterion will only be considered to be satisfied if the nomination demonstrates how the possible inscription would contribute to ensuring the visibility and awareness of the significance of intangible cultural heritage in general, and not only of the inscribed element itself, and to encouraging dialogue that respects cultural diversity.
(i) How could the inscription of the element on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity contribute to the visibility of the intangible cultural heritage in general (and not only of the inscribed element itself) and raise awareness of its importance?

(i.a) Please explain how this would be achieved at the local level. Not fewer than 100 or more than 150 words

Inscription of the Mahadra system on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity will contribute in a special way to reasserting the value of Mauritanian intangible cultural heritage in general, and to drawing the attention of the different communities, groups and individuals in the world to its value in life, its importance and the importance of ensuring its permanence.

This will have a favourable effect at two levels. For the bearers of the element, its inscription will constitute an international acknowledgement of their heritage, which will give rise to a feeling of respect and pride among them and enable them to take further action to enhance this heritage and work for its transmission. On the other hand, it will encourage them to reconsider and reflect on the value of the element, and to take greater interest in it. This inscription will make it possible to raise the awareness of the whole population of the importance of its intangible cultural heritage.

(i.b) Please explain how this would be achieved at the national level. Not fewer than 100 or more than 150 words

The traditional Mahadra teaching system constitutes a component of Mauritanian national identity and plays an important role in development through the eradication of illiteracy, at an insignificant cost to the State. Its inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity will have a positive effect at the national level.

International recognition of this national heritage will consolidate the spirit of tolerance and understanding, encourage the actors concerned to reconsider it, to reflect particularly on it and to appreciate its value. Inscription will enable the creation of better conditions for cooperation and promote social intermingling, thus consolidating the feelings of citizenship, fraternity and solidarity that strengthen national cohesion and unity. At the national level, it will constitute an opportunity for dialogue between communities, groups and individuals on the one hand, and between them and the rest of the societies throughout the world, and particularly societies with similar education systems on the other.

It will also make it possible to draw greater attention among the populations to the importance of their intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding.

(i.c) Please explain how this would be achieved at the international level. Not fewer than 100 or more than 150 words

Inscription of the Mauritanian Mahadra teaching system on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage will offer an opportunity for it to be known by new peoples.

It will enable the world to discover an education system which, despite difficult conditions, made it possible to train scholars whose renown spread beyond the country’s geographical area and gave the country the cultural influence it enjoyed.

Students trained in these Mahadras will be able, thanks to the inscription, to offer their experience to countries interested in setting up an educational system with low costs and significant results as a complement to their systems.

Adopted as a model with regard to religious education, the Mahadra system will be able to lay the foundations of an education that effectively combats violence and extremism.

Inscription of the system will attract the interest of other peoples, groups and individuals, and make it possible to draw attention to the fact that an element of intangible cultural heritage can be a universal source of knowledge and learning.

(ii) How would dialogue among communities, groups and individuals be encouraged by the inscription of the element?
In the course of time - as Arab travellers and European explorers bear witness - the Mahadra has been the epicentre of cultural influence, the school in which principles and values are taught that advocate constructive communication and dialogue, tolerance and respect for other communities, groups and individuals, and other good human behaviours which are necessary today in order to consolidate the factors of unity and cohesion and confront extremist discourse.

Inscription of the education system (Mahadra), will allow for:
- Increased awareness of the use of true religious and cultural values, to firmly establish the principles of dialogue, tolerance, fraternity and citizenship;
- Reinforcement of the role of the Mahadra in the consolidation of the national social base;
- Development of the spirit of solidarity, acceptance of difference and respect for one's cultural heritage.
- Inscription of this element will undoubtedly have a beneficial effect on all communities, groups and individuals, both neighbours and in other parts of the world.

(iii) How would human creativity and respect for cultural diversity be promoted by the inscription of the element?

The Mahadra constitutes a school of life, where students' gifts flourish regardless of age, gender or social position, which explains the large number of children, women and men who attend it. This popular educational institution is highly regarded in all walks of life, and the studies it provides are highly valued. The system is open and accepts all opinions, far removed from any obscurantism or blind fanaticism. Dialogue and pleasant discourse are the Mahadra’s tools for the popularization of culture and knowledge, through debates, in an exceptional spirit of openness.

The influence of the Mahadra was achieved without any violence, exclusively based upon dissemination of the culture of dialogue, openness of spirit and voluntary work promoting exceptional social solidarity.

The Mahadra still plays this magnificent role, sowing the seeds of fraternity, bringing people closer together and facilitating the achievement of the great objectives of dissemination of knowledge, with complete respect for the cultural uniqueness of all.

3. Safeguarding measures

For Criterion R.3, States shall demonstrate that 'safeguarding measures are elaborated that may protect and promote the element'.

3.a. Past and current efforts to safeguard the element

(i) How is the viability of the element being ensured by the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned? What past and current initiatives have they taken in this regard?

The traditional Mahadra education system remained supreme in Mauritania for centuries, which explains the commitment of the communities, groups and individuals concerned to ensuring its renewal and permanence, passing it on to future generations, and adapting to changes. This could be seen in the past through different aspects, as the Mahadra remained the driving force promoting the cultural and social life of Mauritanians and occupied a predominant place in their lives.

Recent decades have seen a remarkable renaissance of and return to this system: 52% of the Mahadras currently in existence (of which there are more than 6,500) were created during the last three centuries, thanks solely to the efforts of communities, groups and individuals, which shows the determination of Mauritanian society to preserve this element of its intangible cultural heritage. It should also be noted that interest in the creation of new Mahadras still continues, with the introduction of reforms for the existing Mahadras, notably through the introduction of new subjects of study and new learning resources and tools. The public authorities have worked to develop the traditional Mahadra system by creating model Mahadras.
The Mahadra is a flexible, living education system, which is low-cost, and is still undergoing major development. It is flourishing thanks to individual and collective efforts. In view of its importance at the national level, the public authorities give free rein to private initiative for the creation of Madrasas as necessary, while scrupulously ensuring respect for the essential values of tolerance, equality, fraternity and respect which have always been the cornerstone of Mahadra education.

Tick one or more boxes to identify the safeguarding measures that have been and are currently being taken by the communities, groups or individuals concerned:

- ☑ transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education
- ☑ identification, documentation, research
- ☐ preservation, protection
- ☑ promotion, enhancement
- ☐ revitalization

(ii) What past and current efforts have the States Parties concerned made to safeguard the element? Specify any external or internal constraints in this regard?

The Mauritanian State and its institutions make efforts to preserve heritage in general, and the Mahadras system in particular, as an intangible cultural element to be registered on the representative list of humanity. By involving communities, groups, individuals and organizations from civil society, the State has enabled them to take direct responsibility themselves, while recognizing associations and leagues which take action in this domain. Its assistance is offered through the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Original Education (Ministère des Affaires Islamiques et de l’Enseignement originel).

The State began these efforts by engaging former Mahadra students as teachers, professors and executives the Civil Service.

In the seventh decade of the last century, a study on Mahadras and the prospects for their development was prepared by an expert on behalf of the government. Subsequently, the Advanced Institute for Islamic Studies and Research (Institut Supérieur des Etudes et des Recherches Islamiques) in Nouakchott was created to cater for graduates from the Mahadras and enable them to study in higher education. More recently, the University of Islamic Sciences (Université des Sciences Islamiques) in Ayoun and the Grande Mahadra Chinguittiya university in Akjoujt were created for the same purpose.

In order to promote the professional training of Mahadra graduates and facilitate their integration into working life, several professional training centres have been created, with programmes designed for them. Training workshops have been organized in various regions of the country to teach them a number of trades. The precarity of the material means and resources put in place for the Mahadras and associations active in the field limits the fulfilment of the objectives set.

Inscription of the Mahadra system as an international intangible cultural element will produce positive effects for public interest in the Mahadra and will reinforce these measures.

Tick one or more boxes to identify the safeguarding measures that have been and are currently being taken by the State(s) Party(ies) with regard to the element:

- ☑ transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education
- ☑ identification, documentation, research
- ☐ preservation, protection
- ☑ promotion, enhancement
- ☐ revitalization

3.b. Safeguarding measures proposed

This section should identify and describe safeguarding measures that will be implemented, especially those intended to protect and promote the element. The safeguarding measures should be described in terms of concrete engagements of the States Parties and communities and not only in terms of possibilities and potentialities.
What measures are proposed to help ensure that the viability of the element is not jeopardized in the future, especially as an unintended result of inscription and the resulting visibility and public attention?

Not fewer than 500 or more than 750 words

The Mauritanian cultural model is closely linked to the Mahadra education system. However, the perpetuation of the Mahadra cannot be fully achieved without meeting the challenges with which it is faced, drawing up effective action plans, providing the means to promote this system, and coordinating the complementary efforts of the authorities concerned in order to preserve and develop it in a modern way.

The material support of the Mauritanian State through the establishment of institutions, infrastructures, equipment and tools (premises, electricity, water, hygiene services, means of communication, books and teaching equipment, etc.), does not alter the fact that much still remains to be done to achieve the anticipated objectives.

The proposed measures aimed at the continuity of the system as part of intangible cultural heritage, and the consolidation of the role that Mauritania played in the sub-region, can be summarized as follows:

1. **Organization, regulation and institutional support**

Revising the organizational framework and completing the conditions of institutional establishment in order to bring all of the essential components of Mahadras (Koranic schools, private institutes, Mahadras) under the supervision of a single entity to ensure coordination and improve performance.

This authority will be responsible for:

- Drawing up statistical studies for the setting up of an IT database and independent studies on the Mahadras in order to acquire modern data enabling revision of strategies;
- Assisting active Mahadras to enhance their role in development;
- Developing and modernizing educational and organizational means and structures and developing the necessary training, accreditation and professional development programmes, rationalizing resources and structure, assisting organizations in charge of Mahadras (leagues, Zawiyas, associations and others), and ensuring follow-up and supervision of successful experiences in order to popularize their models;

2. **Encouraging financial self-sufficiency and independence of the Mahadra**

The modern Mahadra did not inherit any real estate or income-generating activities. Lack of financial planning and the precarity of resources constitute the major challenge facing the Mahadra system. Indeed, although the traditional system could provide the Sheikhs of the Mahadras with the necessary resources to maintain their activity within the framework of social solidarity and although the profession of teacher was exercised on a completely voluntary basis, conditions have changed with urbanization and the emergence of new lifestyles. In order to be able to face the multiple contemporary budgetary costs (wages for administrative and teaching staff, rents, maintenance, services, water and electricity, boarding, equipment and tools, public and administrative charges), the Mahadra now needs permanent resources. It is therefore necessary for them to have property at their disposal that will enable their permanence and complement the efforts of patrons who still continue to provide generously for the Mahadras' needs.

To this end, the Mahadras will need to have their own sources of income, such as agricultural estates, stores and real estate.

With sources of this kind at their disposal, the contributions of patrons will become no more than a useful supplement to the Mahadra's own resources.

- Ensuring the financial independence of the Mahadra by mobilizing waqf, Zakat resources, subsidies from the State and economic partners, donations and unconditional bequests and income from the rational development of these resources. Create new ways to implant the social role of service for the Mahadra in peoples’ minds (mobilization campaigns).
- State assistance through consolidation of infrastructures, creation of vocational training institutions, supply of materials and provision of employment opportunities, will make it possible to firmly establish the permanence of the Mahadra.
- Providing Mahadra graduates with opportunities to pursue studies in higher education at Universities.
3. Programmes, materials and teaching methods

- Establishing complementarity between the school education system and that of the Mahadras, in order to derive maximum benefit and smooth away their apparent contradictions (combining the profound and original usefulness of traditional lessons with ‘modern’ education). It will be necessary to adapt the Mahadras to new realities, to make them a place for basic schooling and the fight against illiteracy, to perpetuate this institution by its effective incorporation into the development process, while preserving its essential original character. In this context, it is important to recall that the law on compulsory schooling for children puts the Mahedra in the same category as a modern school.

- Modernizing educational and organizational means, through the development of training, accreditation and professional development programmes and meeting the structural and resource challenges, incorporating certain modern sciences into the Mahadras programmes, (scientific disciplines, social sciences and computing);

- Professional development for Mahadra teaching staff (sheikhs and teachers), organizing forums and specialized multidisciplinary sessions and providing incentives to sheikhs and graduate students of the Mahadra;

- Conducting an awareness-raising media campaign in the national languages (radio, television, official and independent press and via the Internet, etc.), establishing the avant-garde role of the Mahadra, past, present and future, in people’s minds.

These measures will undoubtedly make it possible to perpetuate this essential element of essential cultural heritage, to ensure it better visibility and guarantee the conditions of its transmission to future generations.

(ii) How will the States Parties concerned support the implementation of the proposed safeguarding measures?

Not fewer than 150 or more than 250 words

The State will support these measures through the application of the law concerning the protection of cultural heritage, which confers protection on the Mahadra as an element of national intangible cultural heritage listed in the National Inventory Register and stipulates the obligation to safeguard and transmit it to future generations.

It will be responsible for:

- The development of an overall plan for the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage,
- Implementation by the ministries concerned of a performance policy for the Mahadra’s mission, establishing complementarity between the latter and official education.
- Organizing the Mahadras, modernizing their programmes while maintaining their specific character.
- Organizing oversight of the Mahadras and their supervision, orientation and assessment of their performance as well as the introduction of the essentials of the sciences and useful specializations in their curricula;
- Assisting the country’s Mahadras, through the allocation of monthly subsidies to sheikhs and students, and providing them with teachers as required;
- Organization of regional forums and meetings concerned with the development of Mahadra education, in order to introduce new teaching concepts from scientific disciplines (programmes and textbooks will be developed for this purpose);
- Examining the ways and means of giving Mahadras the benefit of resources from Zakat (income tax) and Waqf (conditional bequest for charitable purposes);
- Allocating arable and urban land to Mahadras for income-generating activities enabling them to enjoy financial autonomy guaranteeing their safeguard;
- The recent creation of the Prize of the President of the Republic for the study of Mahedras reference works constitutes an additional measure for the safeguarding this element.

(iii) How have communities, groups or individuals been involved in planning the proposed safeguarding measures, including in terms of gender roles, and how will they be involved in their implementation?
The efforts currently being made for the inscription of Mauritanian Mahdara education on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity are a concrete expression of the aspirations of actors in this educational field, such as the groups and individuals concerned, to preserve this aspect of cultural heritage which concerns them first and foremost, in complete coordination with them.

During the preparatory phase of preparing the nomination file for this inscription, contact was made with actors in this field, including scholars and sheikhs of great renown at the national level, as well as organizations active in the field, and a debate on all related issues was organized with their contribution.

Meetings bringing together actors and parties concerned by the element, devoted to discussing the desirability of the nomination and the steps to be taken, if necessary, were held with the National Commission for Heritage and Culture (Conservation Nationale du Patrimoine et de la Culture).

These meetings provided an opportunity to popularize the objectives of the 2003 Convention and the means of benefiting from them, not only for the Mahadra, but for national intangible cultural heritage as a whole.

They were reminded that, as the main bearers of the element, their full participation is required, both in preparing the inscription file and in implementing the resulting measures in the event of inscription, and that the Administration will provide them with the necessary support and supervision via the National Commission for Heritage and Culture.

These meetings provided an opportunity for fruitful exchanges during which the participants expressed their commitment and presented proposals for measures that, from their point of view, have the capacity to achieve the anticipated objectives.

3.c. Competent body(ies) involved in safeguarding

Provide the name, address and other contact information of the competent body(ies) and, if applicable, the name and title of the contact person(s), with responsibility for the local management and safeguarding of the element.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the body:</th>
<th>Conservation Nationale du Patrimoine et de la Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name and title of the contact person:</td>
<td>Nami Mohamed Kaber Salihy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
<td>Ministère de la culture, Nouakchott, B.P. 196, Nouakchott, Mauritanie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone number:</td>
<td>002236302677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email address:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:namisalihy@gmail.com">namisalihy@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Community participation and consent in the nomination process

For Criterion R.4, States shall demonstrate that ‘the element has been nominated following the widest possible participation of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned and with their free, prior and informed consent’.

4.a. Participation of communities, groups and individuals concerned in the nomination process

Describe how the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned have actively participated in all stages of the preparation of the nomination, including in terms of the role of gender.

States Parties are encouraged to prepare nominations with the participation of a wide variety of other parties concerned, including, where appropriate, local and regional governments, communities, NGOs, research institutes, centres of expertise and others. States Parties are reminded that the communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals whose intangible cultural heritage is concerned are essential participants throughout the conception and preparation of nominations, proposals and requests, as well as the planning and implementation of safeguarding measures, and are invited to devise creative measures to ensure that their widest possible participation is built in at every stage, as required by Article 15 of the Convention.

Not fewer than 300 or more than 500 words

Communities, individuals and groups had played the leading role in preserving the Mahadra education system and still continue to play this role. Their efforts have recently been joined by
the efforts of other actors including the State and civil society organizations, represented by Mahadras that are hundreds of years old founded by renowned scholars, which took the form of officially-recognized institutions and associations within society.

In view of the fact that the policy of the State in any nomination process for the inscription of any element on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage involves individuals, groups, communities and associations from civil society active in the field of Mahadra education, these played the greatest role in the preparation of the nomination file.

It is therefore in response to the expectations of these actors (individuals and communities) that the current efforts to inscribe Mahadra education on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity have been undertaken. These actors had greatly appreciated the awareness-raising campaign conducted by the National Commission for Heritage and Culture, in the course of which they were informed of the various aspects concerning the nomination file for inscription of the Mahadra education system on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

A group of sheikhs and famous Mahadra teachers from different regions of the country played an important role in the process of preparing the nomination file, by presenting information, and expressing the Mahadras’ expectations and requests with regard to the conservation of this system and its development.

Local heritage associations contributed to the enrichment of the nomination file and to the development of proposals to promote its conservation;

Mahadras, Zawiyas and private institutes played a significant role in supporting the nomination file.

These actors contributed to the various stages of preparation of the nomination file - from the phase of identifying the components of the element to the collection of information and documentation on-site and studying the procedure to be followed for the presentation of nomination files the effects resulting from its inscription, questions relating to dangers and risks surrounding the element’s various components and the measures and procedures mentioned above.

4.b. Free, prior and informed consent to the nomination

The free, prior and informed consent to the nomination of the element of the community, group or, if applicable, individuals concerned may be demonstrated through written or recorded concurrence, or through other means, according to the legal regimens of the State Party and the infinite variety of communities and groups concerned. The Committee will welcome a broad range of demonstrations or attestations of community consent in preference to standard or uniform declarations. Evidence of free, prior and informed consent shall be provided in one of the working languages of the Committee (English or French), as well as in the language of the community concerned if its members use languages other than English or French.

Attach to the nomination form information showing such consent and indicate below what documents you are providing, how they were obtained and what form they take. Indicate also the gender of the people providing their consent.

Not fewer than 150 or more than 250 words

As explained above, the preparation of the nomination file was carried out in close collaboration with individuals, groups and communities, some of which are affiliated to groups of associations within civil society. These persons and associations were involved throughout the preparation of the file and their comments and suggestions are contained in the recommendations contained therein. In the capacity of bearers of the element, they freely gave their consent for the inscription of the Mahadra system on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. They gave this consent because inscription of this system and efforts aimed at conserving it serve their interests. These individuals and associations include groups of Mahadra sheikhs and famous teachers, distributed over the country’s different regions, as well as local heritage associations and Zawiyas.

All of them are committed, as representatives of the concerned parties, to working to ensure the safeguarding and preservation of the Mahadra education system and have expressed their agreement as representatives of other individuals, groups and communities concerned by this element.
4.c. Respect for customary practices governing access to the element

Access to certain specific aspects of intangible cultural heritage or to information about it is sometimes restricted by customary practices enacted and conducted by the communities in order, for example, to maintain the secrecy of specific knowledge. If such practices exist, demonstrate that the inscription of the element and implementation of the safeguarding measures would fully respect such customary practices governing access to specific aspects of such heritage (cf. Article 13 of the Convention). Describe any specific measures that might need to be taken to ensure such respect.

If no such practices exist, please provide a clear statement that there are no customary practices governing access to the element in at least 50 words.

Not fewer than 50 or more than 250 words

In view of the fact that the Mahadra teaching system is at once ancient and contemporary heritage, is widespread in all Mauritanian regions, and constitutes a means of acquiring knowledge and learning, there are no restrictions or practices that could prevent access to it or that could stand in the way of its learning and popularization. On the contrary, this education does away with all cultural and ethnic differences and immunizes the elites from any complexes in relation to each other. Access to Mahadras is in essence open without restriction and the practice of its teaching has no esoteric or other character that could prevent this. All parties work to preserve this teaching and share it with others, regardless of their origin or gender. There are no restrictions upon access to this teaching as clarified above, and as defined through this nomination.

4.d. Community organization(s) or representative(s) concerned

Provide detailed contact information for each community organization or representative, or other non-governmental organization, concerned with the element such as associations, organizations, clubs, guilds, steering committees, etc.:

a. Name of the entity;
b. Name and title of the contact person;
c. Address;
d. Telephone number;
e. Email address;
f. Other relevant information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a.</th>
<th>b.</th>
<th>c.</th>
<th>d.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>La Mahadra de Noubaghiya pour les sciences islamiques</td>
<td>Mohamed Iben Boutar Ibn Toulba, Professeur à la Mahadra</td>
<td>Noubaghiya – Boutilimitt – Wilaya du Trarza</td>
<td>36387373</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Mahadra de Maata Moulana - La cité educatif</td>
<td>Mohamed El Haj El Mechri</td>
<td>Maata Moulana- Rkiz - Wilaya du Trarza</td>
<td>36656111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Mahadra d’Ehel Seyidi,</td>
<td>Mohamed Ahmed Ould Seyidi, Cheikh de la Mahadra</td>
<td>Moughataa de Teintane, Wilaya du Hodh el Gharbi</td>
<td>48231718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahadra d’Ehel Mohamed Lemine,</td>
<td>Isselmou Ould Mohamed Lemine, Cheikh de la Mahadra</td>
<td>Magtaa Lehjar - Wilaya du Brakna</td>
<td>27514047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Mahdra Pilote à Aoujeft</td>
<td>Taleb Sidi Ould Limam, Cheikh de la Mahadra</td>
<td>Aoujeft, Wilaya d’Adrar</td>
<td>33668877 – 41171658</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. **Inclusion of the element in an inventory**

For **Criterion R.5**, States ***shall demonstrate that the element is identified and included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies)*** in conformity with Articles 11.b and 12 of the Convention.

The inclusion of the nominated element in an inventory should not in any way imply or require that the inventory(ies) should have been completed prior to the nomination. Rather, the submitting State(s) Party(ies) may be in the process of completing or updating one or more inventories, but have already duly included the nominated element in an inventory-in-progress.

Provide the following information:

(i) **Name of the inventory(ies) in which the element is included:**

   Traditional Mauritanian teaching system of the Mahadras

(ii) **Name of the office(s), agency(ies), organization(s) or body(ies) responsible for maintaining and updating that (those) inventory(ies), both in the original language and in translation when the original language is not English or French:**

   National Commission for Heritage and Culture

(iii) **Reference number(s) and name(s) of the element in the relevant inventory(ies):**

   - The overall census conducted by the Department of Islamic Affairs and Original Education in 2010
   - A census devised by the National Commission for Heritage and Culture, updating of the data and information from the previous census of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.

   National inventory form, number 03/2019

(iv) **Date of inclusion of the element in the inventory(ies) (this date should precede the submission of this nomination):**

   National inventory of 5 January 2019

(v) **Explain how the element was identified and defined, including how information was collected and processed ‘with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations’ (Article 11.b) for the purpose of inventorying, including reference to the role of the gender of the participants. Additional information may be provided to demonstrate the participation of research institutes and centres of expertise (max. 200 words).**

In the 1970s, the international expert Le Courtois, conducted a study on the Mahadra on behalf of the Mauritanian government.

This system became well-known in the Arab world during the eighth decade of the last century, when the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) published the book: El Khalil Ould Nahoui entitled ‘Pays de Chinguitti, le Minaret et le Ribat’ (‘Land of Chinguetti, the Minaret and the Ribat’) recounting scientific life, cultural and religious influence through the mobile Bedouin universities (Mahadras). The Department of Islamic Affairs of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Original Education, which is the most directly concerned with the supervision of the Mahadra teaching system, through the Mahadra Department (Direction des Mahadras), conducted an overall census on original education in 2010. This census made it possible to collect important and varied information on this System in Mauritania.
The Ministry of Culture and Handicrafts Industries, through the National Commission for Heritage, which has a special section for intangible cultural heritage, conducted a mission throughout the country, involving communities, groups and individuals concerned with this subject.

The management of inventory and documentation data is ensured by a specialized database which is constantly updated.

(vi) Indicate how often the inventory(ies) is(are) updated (periodicity) (max. 100 words).

Directory of the Ministry of Culture, Crafts and Relations with Parliament (Ministère de la culture, de l’Artisanat et des relations avec le Parlement) 2019-2020

(vii) Explain how the inventory(ies) is(are) regularly updated. The updating process is understood not only as adding new elements but also as revising existing information on the evolving nature of the elements already included therein (Article 12.1 of the Convention) (max. 200 words).

The Ministry of Culture, Crafts and Relations with Parliament, represented by the National Commission for Cultural Heritage, has recently conducted an inventory aimed at updating the available data on the element, the Mauritanian Mahadra teaching system, in coordination with the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Original Education and in close cooperation with individuals, groups and communities working in the field or concerned. These concerned parties had provided all of the data relating to the Mahadra teaching system in Mauritania and provided information on the problems it encounters.

On this basis, the fieldwork had two essential aspects:
- The first involved direct interviews with sheikhs and persons in charge of Mahadras, during which all data pertaining to the element was documented.
- For its part, the second concerns the collection and documentation of information within the framework of meetings with individuals and representatives of leagues and Zawiyas, connected with the element. They provided additional data on the subject and set out the problems from which it suffers, as well as any current transformations in this field. They also presented measures and proposals for safeguarding and ensuring the permanence of the element.

(viii) Documentary evidence shall be provided in an annex demonstrating that the nominated element is included in one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies), as defined in Articles 11.b and 12 of the Convention. Such evidence shall at least include the name of the element, its description, the name(s) of the communities, groups or, if applicable, individuals concerned, their geographic location and the range of the element.

a. If the inventory is available online, provide hyperlinks (URLs) to pages dedicated to the nominated element (max. four hyperlinks in total, to be indicated in the box below). Attach to the nomination print-outs (no more than ten standard A4 sheets) of relevant sections of the content of these links. The information should be provided in English or French, as well as in the original language if different.

b. If the inventory is not available online, attach exact copies of texts (no more than ten standard A4 sheets) concerning the element included in the inventory. These texts should be provided in English or French as well as in the original language if different.

Indicate the materials provided and – if applicable – the relevant hyperlinks:

Appendix: National inventory form, no. 003 of 05/01/2019

6. Documentation

6.a. Appended documentation (mandatory)

The documentation listed below is mandatory and will be used in the process of evaluating and examining the nomination. The photographs and the video will also be helpful for activities geared at ensuring the visibility of the element if it is inscribed. Tick the following boxes to confirm that the related items are included with the nomination and that they follow the instructions. Additional materials other than those specified below cannot be accepted and will not be returned.

- documentary evidence of the consent of communities, along with a translation into English or French if the language of the community concerned is other than English or French;
documentary evidence demonstrating that the nominated element is included in an inventory of the intangible cultural heritage present in the territory(ies) of the submitting State(s) Party(ies), as defined in Articles 11 and 12 of the Convention; such evidence shall include a relevant extract of the inventory(ies) in English or in French, as well as in the original language, if different;

- ten recent photographs in high definition;
- grant(s) of rights corresponding to the photos (Form ICH-07-photo);
- edited video (from five to ten minutes), subtitled in one of the languages of the Committee (English or French) if the language utilized is other than English or French;
- grant(s) of rights corresponding to the video recording (Form ICH-07-video).

6.b. Principal published references (optional)

Submitting States may wish to list, using a standard bibliographic format, the principal published references providing supplementary information on the element, such as books, articles, audiovisual materials or websites. Such published works should not be sent along with the nomination.

Not to exceed one standard page.

The overall census conducted by the Department of Islamic Affairs and Original Education in 2010
A census devised by the National Commission for Heritage and Culture, updating of the data and information from the previous census of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs.
- Khalil Ould Nahoui, “Land of Chinguetti, Elmenara and Erribatt

7. Signature(s) on behalf of the State(s) Party(ies)

The nomination should be signed by the official empowered to do so on behalf of the State Party, together with his or her name, title and the date of submission.

In the case of multinational nominations, the document should contain the name, title and signature of an official of each State Party submitting the nomination.

Name: Nami Mohamed Saber Salihy
Title: Conservateur National du Patrimoine et de la Culture
Date: 29 September 2020 (revised version)
Signature: <signed>