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Guidelines for the Establishment of National “Living Human Treasures” Systems

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“A true tradition is not the witness of a remote past; it is a living force that enlivens and nourishes the present. Far from a mere repetition of what has gone before, a tradition is an on-going reality. It can be considered as family property, a heritage one receives on the condition that it be allowed to fructify before its transmission to future generations”¹. Igor Stravinsky, Poetics of Music, Paris 1952

I. Introduction

1. Background

(i) The importance of the intangible cultural heritage, as well as that of its safeguarding, is widely recognized by the world community, as the adoption of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage by the General Conference of UNESCO, in October 2003, bears witness. Article 2 of this Convention states that the intangible cultural heritage provides communities, groups and individuals with a sense of identity and continuity, while the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage guarantees creativity. However, much of the knowledge and skills linked to music, dance, theatre and traditional craftsmanship, for instance, are in danger of disappearing due to declining numbers of practitioners, growing disinterest of young people and lack of funds.

(ii) An important preliminary measure for safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage is to ensure its identification by drawing up and regularly updating one or more national inventories (cf. Article 12 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage).

(iii) However, other than this initial identification stage, one of the most effective ways to achieve the sustainable safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage would be to guarantee that the bearers of that heritage continue to further develop their knowledge and skills and transmit them to younger generations.

(iv) Bearing in mind this double perspective, the bearers of the intangible cultural heritage must be identified, among whom some will be given official recognition and encouraged to continue to develop and transmit their knowledge and skills. For this reason UNESCO proposes to Member States that they establish national systems of “Living Human Treasures”.

(v) In 1993, the Republic of Korea proposed to the UNESCO Executive Board, the establishment of a UNESCO “Living Human Treasures” programme, and the Board adopted a decision inviting Member States to establish such systems in their respective countries. Since then, several meetings and international workshops have been organized with a view to promoting the concept and encouraging the establishment of national systems.

¹ Unofficial translation.

2. Definitions

(i) *Living Human Treasures* are persons who possess to a very high degree the knowledge and skills required for performing or re-creating specific elements of the intangible cultural heritage. Each Member State should choose an appropriate title to designate the bearers of knowledge and skills, the title of "Living Human Treasures" proposed by UNESCO being indicative. Among the systems in existence, there are already a variety of titles: Master of Art (France), Bearer of Popular Craft Tradition (Czech Republic), National Living Treasure (Republic of Korea), Holder of an Important Intangible Cultural Property (Japan and Republic of Korea).

(ii) *Intangible cultural heritage*, or living heritage, consists of practices and expressions, as well as the knowledge, skills and values associated therewith, that communities and groups recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

This heritage is transmitted from generation to generation, for the most part orally. It is constantly recreated in response to changes in the social and cultural environment. It provides individuals, groups and communities with a sense of identity and continuity and constitutes a guarantee of sustainable development.

(iii) "Intangible cultural heritage" is manifested *inter alia* in the following *domains*, on the understanding that the expressions of intangible cultural heritage can simultaneously belong to several of these domains:

- " (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (e) traditional craftsmanship." (Article 2.2 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage).

(iv) *Safeguarding* of intangible cultural heritage means:

"measures aimed at ensuring the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage." (Article 2.3)

3. Objectives

(i) The primary purpose of establishing national Living Human Treasures systems is to preserve the knowledge and skills necessary for the performing, enactment or re-creation of intangible cultural heritage elements with high historical, artistic or cultural value.

(ii) Besides public recognition, the system includes measures for the provision of, for example, special grants/subsidies to designated Living Human Treasures, so that they can assume their responsibilities for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage. These measures aim especially at:

1. The perpetuation and development of their knowledge and skills;
2. The transmission of their knowledge and skills to the younger generations through formal or non-formal training programmes;
3. Contributing to the documenting and recording of the intangible cultural heritage concerned (video or audio recording, publications, etc.);
4. Dissemination of their knowledge and skills;
5. Any additional duties entrusted to them.

(iii) The system should also encourage younger people to learn and acquire the knowledge and skills required for the enactment or re-creation of elements of the intangible cultural heritage by providing them with public recognition and support at the community, national or international levels.

II. Elements for the establishment of Living Human Treasures systems

1. Legal provisions

(i) Member States wishing to set up a Living Human Treasures system need to establish means of administering it that are appropriate to their national specificities. There is no single method to be recommended. Indeed, the different legal traditions that govern the choice of texts for the creation of such a system vary from country to country. Thus, it is not necessary that the legal form for the creation of a Living Human Treasures system be a national law: rather, such a system could also be established through administrative measures, operating within the general powers of a particular ministry or through a non-governmental organization that may be assisted by governmental funds.

(ii) It is recommended that such dispositions that comprise the institutional basis of the system be associated with an active participation by communities, groups and individuals. Even if some dispositions originating from the government are necessary for the setting up of the system at the institutional level, the participation and consultation of communities, groups and individuals must be taken into account to ensure an efficient implementation of the system at all stages (identification and selection of domains of intangible cultural heritage and their bearers, training, promotion and other safeguarding measures). Reference here is made to Article 15 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which stipulates that “each State Party shall endeavour to ensure the widest possible participation of communities, groups and, where appropriate, individuals that create, maintain and transmit such heritage, and to involve them actively in its management”.

2. Identification

(i) Once the decision is made to introduce a Living Human Treasures system, it is necessary to establish which elements of the intangible cultural heritage are concerned, at national and local level, and to identify the bearers, amongst which the future nominees for the title of Living Human Treasure may be selected. The experiences gained in various countries show that there are considerable differences in the decisions taken by the Member States concerned.

(ii) Consequently, even if such a system should preferably be conceived to apply to all domains of intangible cultural heritage of all communities, it does not need to cover all aspects of intangible cultural heritage, nor all the communities nor the whole territory. The implementation of the scheme itself depends on what each Member State wants and can achieve and should not be overly influenced by what has been done elsewhere. A number of possible schemes and approaches exist, including the following ones:

1. The system may be restricted in its application to one or several domains of intangible cultural heritage (see domains in Chapter I. 2 (iii) above);
2. The application of a system may be restricted to one or several communities or regions of a Member State;
3. A system may be adjusted after its establishment so as to suit various aspects of culture within a Member State.

(iii) There is no one method for the identification of intangible cultural heritage. In this respect, Article 12 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage indicates that “to ensure identification with a view to safeguarding, each State Party shall draw up, in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more inventories of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory”.

3. Commission of experts

(i) An entity, in the form of a Commission of experts, needs to be established to make appropriate decisions. It is recommended that this body be attached to a competent institutional structure for the safeguarding of intangible cultural heritage. If such a structure already exists, there is no need to create a new one. Reference here is made to Article 13 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage inviting States Parties to designate or establish one or more competent bodies for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory.

(ii) The experts comprising this Commission could be civil servants, researchers in the domain of intangible cultural heritage, bearers of knowledge and skills, representatives of communities, local authorities and associative bodies. It should be assisted by a Secretariat provided by the institutional structure to which it is dependent (see (i) above). If need be, outside experts may be called upon for the selection and examination of candidatures.

(iii) The Commission's first task will be to investigate which aspects of the intangible cultural heritage should be identified/designated as a priority for their safeguarding. It must be made clear that setting priorities does not mean that other components of the intangible cultural heritage are not important.

(iv) The Commission may rely on the knowledge and expertise of its members in proposing nominations. However, it is preferable to create a mechanism whereby persons fulfilling the requisite conditions can be brought to the attention of the Commission. The Commission might call for recommendations from communities and relevant bodies periodically. Individuals, relevant communities, institutions, non-governmental organizations or any other bodies may also make

their recommendations on their own initiative. All nominations are to be prepared in close coordination with the tradition bearers concerned and submitted in documented files; no decisions about tradition bearers and their traditions should be taken without their consent.

(v) Two forms of nomination are recommended, as follows:

1. Individual nomination

It is appropriate to nominate persons who individually possess in a very high degree the knowledge and skills required for the selected domain of the intangible cultural heritage.

2. Collective recognition

In certain types of intangible cultural heritage, it is preferable to nominate a group of people who collectively possess and/or exercise collectively relevant knowledge and skills. This may for instance be appropriate in the case of performing or applied arts when the performance of a group is identified as more important than the role of an individual.

(vi) After examination of the candidature files, the Commission of experts proposes to the Minister or authority concerned a list of persons who possess to a high level the relevant knowledge and skills in a given domain, for nomination, using as guiding reference the established criteria as set out under paragraph 4 (ii) below. In most cases, the Minister makes the final decision concerning the selection of the Living Human Treasures, but this role can be assumed by another body according to the administrative structure of each Member State.

(vii) The Commission will be responsible for the continuous monitoring of the Living Human Treasures. This includes ensuring that the Living Human Treasures continue to assume their responsibilities and, if necessary, to further conditions that facilitate this continuation of assumption of responsibilities (See III : Measures for sustainable safeguarding).

4. Selection criteria

(i) Elements of the intangible cultural heritage

In choosing an element or a domain of the intangible cultural heritage to be safeguarded by way of a Living Human Treasures system, Member States should have regard to the following criteria which may be elaborated upon and/or completed by others:

- its value as a testimony of human creative genius;

- its roots in cultural and social traditions;
- its representative character for a given community or group;
- the risk of its disappearing.

(ii) Living Human Treasures

In nominating a person or a group to the rank of "Living Human Treasure", the Commission should consider the following criteria for eligibility:

- the excellence in the application of the knowledge and skills displayed;
- the dedication of the person or group;
- the ability of the person or group to further develop his knowledge and skills;
- the ability of the person or group to pass on the knowledge and skills to trainees.

In addition to these criteria for eligibility, it is appropriate to define not only clear criteria for maintenance but also for removal (see 7 below).

5. Number of nominees

Budgetary constraints may limit the number of appointments, or restrictions may be placed on nominations in order to maintain the exceptional nature of the title "Living Human Treasure". Issues relating to the representation of regional or local groups or communities may also be important. In this respect, it is important that the restrictions to be applied by the Commission, including the maximum number of appointments which can be made in any given cycle, be officially communicated.

6. Recognition and rewards for appointees

(i) The principal reward for a Living Human Treasure is public recognition. To ensure this, the honours should be conferred at a formal ceremony presided over by a high-ranking dignitary, involving a distinctive emblem (medal, diploma, etc.), and preferably linked with a programme of activities both expressing and celebrating the cultural heritage for which a Living Human Treasure has been appointed.

(ii) However, over and above this official recognition conferred upon the Living Human Treasures, the goal of the establishment of a Living Human Treasures system is to ensure the transmission of knowledge and skills which these bearers master and to thus ensure the perpetuity of the expression of the intangible cultural heritage concerned.

(iii) Therefore, financial rewards should be also considered, in order to encourage the Living Human Treasures to assume their responsibilities of transmission, documentation and promotion (see Chapter III below). Rewards may also be granted to trainees.

(iv) These financial rewards may be paid in the form of one unique amount or of annual or monthly stipends. The stipends will vary and should be given in cases of need or adjusted to the earnings of the Living Human Treasure. Also, it may be deemed appropriate to grant a tax exemption with regard to income earned by the Living Human Treasure.

(v) Member States may provide Living Human Treasures with financial assistance to enable them to perform or create specific elements of intangible cultural heritage. This may involve the provision of raw materials, or equipment and supplies in cases where the construction or running costs of workshops, training facilities, etc. are burdensome.

(vi) Other types of rewards could also be considered depending on the social structure of each Member State. For example, when there is no public health service, the grant of medical and hospitalization benefits would be a considerable benefit.

7. Cancellation of title

It is the Commission's task to recommend the cancellation of the decision to designate a Living Human Treasure following consultation with the Minister for Cultural Affairs or any other competent body. The reasons for cancellation can be set out in a code of ethics on the exercise of the practice for which the laureate was designated. These reasons may be diverse, but should notably be:

- (i) the Living Human Treasure does not fulfil the functions assigned to him/her;
- (ii) the Living Human Treasure no longer fulfils the criteria whereby he/she was recognized.

To summarise, the following steps are recommended to be undertaken to establish a national Living Human Treasure system:

1. define the modalities for its implementation within legal or regulatory provisions;
2. decide the extent of the proposed system, e.g. establish whether it includes one, several or all the domains of the intangible cultural heritage, at the national level or limited to specific groups or communities or again to a specific region;
3. identify, in the form of inventory(ies) elements of the intangible cultural heritage as well as their bearers;
4. create a Commission of experts to:
 - formulate recommendations concerning the elements of the intangible cultural heritage to be safeguarded;
 - study candidatures of bearers of knowledge and skills in these domains;
 - recommend, for final decision, based on established selection criteria, the candidates for the title of Living Human Treasure;
 - cancel the designation decision, if necessary;
 - closely monitor the evolution of the implementation of the Living Human Treasures system;
 - gauge the effects of the implementation of the system with regard to the transmission of knowledge and skills and their viability and, if need be, adapt the system.

In order to facilitate the implementation of the Living Human Treasures system, it might be considered useful to elaborate guidelines specifying, notably, the title and the definition of Living Human Treasures, selection criteria, nomination form, deadlines for submission of candidature, modalities for examination by the Commission of experts, calendar of examination of candidatures, maximum number of laureates each year, date of announcement of results and the rights and obligations of the laureates.

III. Measures for a sustainable safeguarding

1. Transmission

Appropriate training, whether at formal educational institutions or through direct and traditional master/pupil apprenticeships, is essential in order to ensure that the knowledge and skills are transmitted from the Living Human Treasures to young people. In this connection, Member States could, if necessary, in conjunction with competent bodies, be responsible for ensuring efficient training programmes by providing Living Human Treasures with technical and financial assistance (see Chapter II. 6. (iii) to (v) above). This training concurs with the spirit of Article 14 of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage which invites each State Party to establish specific educational and training programmes within the communities and groups concerned (paragraph (a) item (ii)), as well as non-formal means of transmitting knowledge (paragraph (a) item (iv)).

2. Documentation

(i) Member States will, in conjunction with competent bodies and documentation institutions, ensure appropriate documentation of the knowledge and skills employed by Living Human Treasures, using all available methods (collection, cataloguing, transcription, etc.). This is also stated in Article 13 (d) of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, which encourages States Parties to:

“Adopt appropriate legal, technical, administrative and financial measures aimed at ... establishing documentation institutions for the intangible cultural heritage and facilitating access to them”.

(ii) Furthermore, in implementing these measures, it is also recommended to establish inventories of institutions, archives and documentation systems, museums or ethnographical departments, existing museums concerned with the intangible cultural heritage, and to train collectors, archivists, documentalists and other specialists.

3. Promotion

Member States should, in conjunction with competent bodies, ensure on-going public awareness about the importance of intangible cultural heritage and its safeguarding. This may involve:

(i) Awareness-raising and promotion by regularly organizing performances, demonstrations, exhibitions, etc. In this way an audience will be created, the Living Human Treasures will be motivated to practice and further develop their knowledge and

skills, and those who, among the young generations, wish to be trained, will be provided with opportunities to enrich their experiences;

- (ii) Provision of subventions to enable research and publishing of printed, audio, video and multi-media documents related to the intangible cultural heritage concerned and its bearers;
- (iii) Introduction of intangible cultural heritage into educational curricula.

IV. Assistance for establishing national Living Human Treasures systems

1. If possible, UNESCO will provide financial and/or technical assistance to help Member States in establishing their national Living Human Treasures systems, through its Participation Programme and Extra-budgetary contributions from Member States, over and above the Organization's regular budgetary funding.
2. Taking into consideration the future entry into force of the newly adopted Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the programmes should be properly conceived to concur with the national safeguarding actions to be taken by States Parties for the implementation of the Convention. UNESCO's financial and technical assistance could be provided for the identification of Living Human Treasures and the implementation of transmission activities by the Living Human Treasures, such as training, documentation of their skills and knowledge, and promotion.