



## In the End -There is the Beginning

Professor Amareswar Galla

**D**istinguished colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity to address the final session and proceedings of this challenging and timely conference. This may be the closing session of the conference. But it is the beginning of a long journey in our common mission to promote the safeguarding of ICH in the Asia Pacific Region and beyond.

Thank you chairperson, Madame Cécile Duvelle, Chief of the Intangible Heritage Section, UNESCO, for your introduction. It is a daunting and challenging task to address this final session after so many experienced and wise people have spoken. The structure of the Conference enabled us to take both global and local perspectives in our arguments, advocacy and criticism. Korean perspectives played an important role for us to stop and take stock of our efforts based on the rich experience of our host country and learn from the various experts gathered from across Korea. Reflections and discussions, both technical conceptual, have been provided in the earlier sections of this publication. I will concentrate on the main thrust of our thinking here and will not mention the names of each individual who took the floor.

It has been a wonderful opportunity for us to come together from so many different disciplines, professional, official and community backgrounds to share experiences and case studies through a series of reflective sessions on various aspects of the ICH Convention and the Operational Directives

for its implementation. We all join in one voice to thank the hospitality and excellent facilitation of the event by our Korean hosts, ICHCAP, especially its Executive Director, Mr Seong-Yong Park and his staff, the Chairperson of the Advisory Board, Professor Dawnhee Yim, and Mr. Kun Moo Yi, Director General, Cultural Heritage Administration, Republic of Korea. We are a diverse group of participants here bringing multiple voices in the way we have been scoping the challenges and opportunities in the safeguarding of ICH. Professor Aikawa and Madame Duvelle brought their considerable expertise to the discussions along with a range of experts here.

One of the key messages from the sessions is that we must stop and be reflective on where we have come from and where we are going in our common purpose. This Convention is very different from every other Convention. We need to balance the way we deal with the diversity of heritage resources and develop integrated approaches for sustainable heritage development. As discussed in the various Inter Governmental Committee meetings in the drafting of the Operational Directives for the ICH Convention, the way forward will be informed by getting on with the job and developing a critical practice of safeguarding ICH. There's an old Chinese saying that unless the iron is heated it will not become steel. In our learning we have the cumulative wisdom of so many people to guide us, in the way the Convention was drafted, its very purpose, its timing, various concerns and opportunities to further develop the Operational Directives.

The Director General of UNESCO in his speech last month, in Abu Dhabi to the Inter Governmental Committee meeting of the ICH Convention, said that ten years ago when he came from Japan, he came with a background where they had been dealing with balancing the management of both tangible and intangible heritage. He emphasised that the decade has been about finding the balance in the way we deal with both tangible and intangible heritage and also establish a new level of intercultural dialogue that brings together practices of countries of the South and the North.

There have been focused thematic discussions throughout this Conference. Professor Dawnhee Yim called on us to develop post-colonial thinking in the Asia Pacific Region. Asia-Pacific is post-colonial. Asia-Pacific has got its own challenges. We need to decolonise our practices, I'm using her paper as a base, decolonise our minds the way we think about heritage. She provided the argument for a fundamental paradigm shift.

The postcolonial discourse of some of the sessions has been of particular significance for someone like me, born and educated in free and independent

India and educated at the end of the UN decolonising process at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. India, like many countries of the Asia Pacific Region, continues to face the challenges of dealing with a hegemonic heritage management derived from colonial institutions. The legacies are further complicated by the rapid growth and its spread across the world through donors and aid agencies, of a western heritage industry what was originally a concern of Europe given the devastation after the Second World War. The legacies of alien knowledge systems were most evident in the twin processes, one natural, one cultural, that were brought together into what has become the World Heritage Convention in 1972.

And in fact, when an analysis was conducted of World Heritage Areas for the World Commission for Culture and Development in the 1990s, it was not surprising that not all that long ago, there were very few World Heritage Areas inscribed from Africa. There were so many World Heritage Areas from Europe because the criteria were largely driven by European concerns through the World Heritage Convention. It was not until 1994 Conference in Nara, and the Nara Document, that the spotlight was on to rethink the notion of what is authenticity with the recognition and respect for ICH. The earlier principle of the non-duality of permanence and authenticity in heritage conservation gave way to respect and understanding that authenticity is culturally contextualised, acknowledging the existence of different heritage values and criteria. It was the first time there was a systematic engagement as to how you deal with intangible heritage, leading to a transformation in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

I showed a diagram this morning arguing for a holistic approach to sustainable heritage development. This was actually published in the Nara Proceedings. As the copyright there indicates, it was drawn in the sand at Crocodile Hole, near Turkey Creek by Aboriginal elders from about 200 communities in the Kimberley, north-western Australia. The drawing is an illustration of how Aboriginal people see their own heritage, and as famously articulated by the elders, culture is a map written in the land. To read the map you need to know the ICH of the custodians. But you need to understand the linkage, the world view that people belong to the land, that ICH is the way they breathe, find continuity of life through the wisdom of their ancestors. It is about the sense of place, collective identity and cultural self esteem of belonging to the land. It has been pointed out here that we need to safeguard urgently the ICH elements in indigenous communities, especially in the light of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, September, 2007.

This Conference is a turning point, the first one, as Madame Duvelle mentioned, after the first cycle of the Convention with inscriptions on the Urgent Safeguarding List and Representative Lists under the ICH Convention in Abu Dhabi last month. We have now reached that milestone to stop and rethink, and the reflection that she provided advocates a careful engagement, that the kind of new discourse warrants. Some of new ideas may not be so new for stakeholder communities or for several of the specialists and researchers, but we need to continue to scope and find pathways for coming together in the local, regional, national (State Party) and international efforts to safeguard ICH. One common concern here is about the fewer ICH elements on the Urgent Safeguarding List as compared to the Representative List. Ironically urgent safeguarding provided the impetus for the drafting of the ICH Convention.

Several participants have argued that in some ways, maybe for the time being, maybe for another ten years, we need to get out of the mode of thinking of the World Heritage Convention knowledge that we have become so familiar with, because there are so many training programmes, so many manuals, years and years, so many millions of dollars spent on promoting and capacity building for what has become the most globalising and powerful of standard setting instruments of UNESCO, the World Heritage Convention. Participants here have articulated this concern and call for an emphasis on safeguarding in the ICH Convention. Madame Aikawa pointed out that outstanding universal value central to the World Heritage Convention, is not an issue for the ICH Convention. In fact, there is no hierarchy of heritage thinking promoted by the ICH Convention. Madame Duvelle and all the participants emphasised the importance of focussing on the carriers and the transmitters of ICH. It has also been pointed out that authenticity does not figure as a determining factor in the ICH convention.

The dominance of site centred and object centred thinking in heritage conservation needs to be balanced with community centred thinking through appropriate and empowering approaches. But all this needs a partnership approach with multiple stakeholders: there are primary stakeholders, the carriers and transmitters of ICH; and then there are secondary stakeholders like the research institutes, experts and the whole range of people who play the role of being mediators, facilitators in assisting us with urgent safeguarding of ICH. Finally there are the tertiary stakeholders: government bodies and international bodies that provide the auspicing mechanisms in the safeguarding process. To quote Jacques Derrida, the project is without an end.

There's no milestone approach to safeguarding based on the common practice of conservation plans and master plans. Safeguarding is an ongoing organic process.

And in all of this, as we work together, participants have underlined the role of civil society which is extremely important. We discussed here about the role of NGOs in the safeguarding and the implementation of the ICH Convention. In Abu Dhabi we had a series of NGO meetings along with the inputs of expert examiners from the NGOs and carrier communities. The summary was presented by a young Mexican colleague, Ms. Cristina Amescua from the International Social Science Council, illustrating the concerns of civil society mechanisms. The importance of intergenerational dialogue was emphasised in safeguarding ICH. One of the concerns from several countries was the participation of Community Based Organisations, CBOs. There was not a single NGO or CBO representing Africa in Abu Dhabi. During my five years of professional and community engagement in Southern Africa, I found that CBO is more of a relevant and empowering mechanism that is African and contextually relevant. Similarly we are yet to scope and understand the civil society mechanisms in the Asia Pacific Region.

For several people, the moment you use accredited NGOs as a means to heritage development; it brings back the spectre of the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development, 2002. Why? When the accreditation officer from the UN, went through the accreditation process for the Summit, she was surprised and disappointed about the power relations in the world of sustainable development. The substantial majority of NGOs, at the World Summit, were from North America and Western Europe. The substantial outcome of Rio Earth Summit, Local Agenda 21, was being managed by NGOs of these countries. So in the Johannesburg, we advocated that you need to deal with a range of mechanisms around which communities organise themselves. Donor support for NGOs, while acknowledging their importance and the excellent work that they do, should consider whether their inputs are empowering or not for the primary stakeholders. The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid effectiveness and the associated Accra Action Plan calls for ethical practice in donor support. The host of the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit, President Thabe Mbeki, advocated the philosophy of African Renaissance as an empowering framework for engagement with Africa. Participants here mentioned about learning from other regions of the world and Africa has a lot to offer us. We could also share our knowledge and experiences in safeguarding ICH with other regions.

Several participants here referred to misunderstandings and the many stereotypes that continue to plague the heritage industry. How do we address the tyranny of binary stereotypes as both colonial and post colonial constructs? These include: tangible and intangible, natural and cultural, movable and immovable, traditional and contemporary. How do we recognise and address the cultural diversity of contexts that inform the different areas of the Asia Pacific? Critical reflection is advocated for addressing binaries which are very powerful legacies, especially in the Asia Pacific Region and corrective action through local knowledge systems that call for holistic approaches.

A range of terminology – authentic, excellence, aesthetics, significance, masterpieces – that provide us critical tools to ensure integrity and quality assurance have different meanings and significations in different cultural contexts. It is said that cultural diversity is the common heritage of humanity. The challenge for us is to develop a tool kit that ensures respect for diverse cultural meanings. Intercultural dialogue becomes significant both within and beyond cultural communities and their diverse interest groups. There is some fear mongering that respecting certain ICH elements might be in violation of Human Rights. Rather than limiting the dialogue and promotion of the ICH Convention, we are debating these concerns so as to ensure human rights as the ICH Convention clearly mandates.

The one thing that Madame Aikawa emphasised throughout is the need for conceptual rigour. We need to interrogate our heritage practices; we need respect the understandings of what is safeguarding within diverse language and community contexts. We also need to have a shared understanding of what is safeguarding as an evolving framework. And when we talk about continuity of the First Voice of communities and the way we safeguard ICH elements, we need to consider their viability as critical. In this effort are we documenting, inventorying and freezing living heritage in time? In our last panel, the Korean scholars were very concerned about this possibility. So what is the viability of the ICH elements in the host communities, the sustainable heritage development?

The understanding of community and the civil society participation, the notion of carriers, individuals, research bodies, makes for us in the Asia Pacific, the ICH Convention, the most empowering democratic convention. Because this is what we would like to have seen in all the other Conventions. In the past, we raised issues even in the way the Hague convention defines what is cultural property as something very tangible, very alien in some ways to the understandings of what is cultural property in the regional cultural

contexts. ICH needs to be understood from respecting, as the Convention advocates, the cultural diversity of the world, and here the cultural diversity of the Asia Pacific Region, an area mentioned several times in the conference as the majority of the world's population.

It has been a concern that so often Asia Pacific is mentioned but the Pacific Island countries continue to remain at the margins and often forgotten. The Pacific Code of Ethics for Museums and Cultural Centres by the Pacific Islands Museums Association provides a valuable framework for addressing ICH in the Pacific. Our Fijian colleague, Mr Simione Sevudredre made an exemplary presentation as to how they are systematically mapping the ICH and traditional knowledge across the fourteen provinces of the Fiji Islands through the *First Voice* of the people. He also pointed out that it is a challenge as to how they are going to safeguard the ICH elements and the viability of what they're mapping in their communities.

But what is the community, a question that was raised throughout this conference. The very notion of the community has been interrogated in different contexts by researchers since the promotion of cultural democracy in the 1970s. Perhaps what is best advocated by the participants here is that the sense of a stakeholder community in safeguarding ICH elements and its interest groups should be understood, not from the point of the view of only the outsider defining what is a community, but most importantly from within. Dr Minh Ly argued that we need tools for this process of community empowerment. Ecomuseology as used in Vietnam is considered a constructive and useful tool in this endeavour.

Dr Sudha Gopalakrishnan considers this a huge challenge. How do communities perceive themselves as communities? How useful are administrative regions, because she used the administrative region of Kerala. Can we discuss cultural regions used by cultural geographers? How do you perceive what is a community? How does a community perceive itself? How do outside people perceive it? And we are many peoples, at once, not just one community but many communities negotiating and crossing different cultural borders in our daily lives. These questions were discussed with reference to safeguarding here and no doubt will be the focus of similar future debates and discussions. To define may be containing the meaning of what is understood in the use of the term community. In several Asia Pacific languages a comparable term, people or peoples, is used.

The 2003 ICH Convention promotes the participation of primary stakeholders far more than any of the other Conventions. But what does

participation mean? Is it through a process of empowerment which is where the civil society organisations have a critical role to play? Even if you have a strong sense of community, you could still be oblivious to some of the forces of globalisation, how they can destroy your own sense of place and identity, your ICH elements. You react to them from within because that resilience of communities is to survive, to deal with their own issues and this is where the whole question of how does one enable the participation of communities, NGOs and CBOs is extremely critical. What is good practice in this area? Could we profile in future such good practices, as emphasised by several people here.

The notion of volunteerism, the notion of social responsibility has been mentioned by some participants. This is an integral part of safeguarding, a core community responsibility. But volunteerism, the way it's understood in the west, is very alien in most Asia Pacific countries. However, there's a very strong sense of social responsibility and intergenerational responsibility in the Region. But how does one actually bring together that sense of social responsibility and the safeguarding of ICH within the stakeholder communities? While there are many examples one could draw upon in the Region, we need to profile them and share the diversity of knowledge.

One of the biggest challenges is documentation which together with inventories became the topic of discussion in several papers. The Committee for Documentation of the International Council of Museums (ICOM-CIDOC) has been addressing this concern and the need for new ways of dealing with ICH elements. CHIN – Cultural Heritage Information Network of Canada, in Ottawa, has a lot to offer in the documentation of cultural diversity and ICH. Discussions here concerned the way documentation is conducted. Concern was also raised that standardisation without careful examination could become a threat to the cultural diversity of ICH.

ICHCAP, our hosts, have been working on partnership projects with Mongolia, Vietnam and India addressing inventories and documentation of ICH elements. These scoping projects and more to come would be extremely useful. It is also an integral part of capacity building, as emphasised by Dr Ly. Moreover, participants cautioned us against ranking or creating hierarchies in the inventory development as this is totally antithetical to the very spirit of the Convention.

And finally, a major concern is the whole question of intellectual and cultural property rights. Almost all the participants voiced their concerns that there is inadequate understanding and examination of issues in this area. Mr.



Wend Wendland from WIPO and several of our Korean colleagues raised different issues and challenged us to consider the processes of empowerment or disempowerment of carriers and transmitters of ICH in the process of safeguarding. As Wend Wendland pointed out that the 'crux of the problem is that information about us is not owned by us'.

And also the notion of indigenous, while it is very clear in Pacific Island countries, it is very contentious and poorly understood in many countries. There is common ground to address this concern with reference to the ICH Convention, the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Language diversity and the vulnerability of ICH and linguistic heritage is nowhere more poignantly evident as among indigenous populations. What does viability mean within one's own linguistic and cultural context? These are significant issues for discussion and debate.

Finally, please allow me to share a Jataka story from the Buddhist literature. It is one attributed to Gautama Buddha who narrated the story of the seven blind men who wanted to see the elephant. One got hold of the leg of the elephant and thought, oh, the elephant is very like a pillar, like a column. Another one touched the tail of the elephant and said, ah, the elephant is like a pincham or a fan/or fly whisk. Another one touched the ear of the elephant, and said, ah, the elephant is like a vat for sorting grain. So each one touched a different part of the elephant and felt satisfied knowing the elephant. It may be a story about what nirvana is about. But it is equally applicable for us here trying to understand safeguarding ICH.

There is no one way of dealing with the safeguarding of ICH. We need to be reflective, revealing and confronting of current approaches to heritage development and consider as to how we want to move forward in safeguarding ICH. In addressing what is safeguarding and its viability in the host communities we need to consider the role of all the stakeholders and promote cultural diversity respecting multiple voices.

We need more forums like this conference, more discussions, and more facilitation. I would also like to congratulate our Korean hosts for involving Mr Jiang Dong from China and Mr Shigeyuki Miyata from Japan, the responsible directors for the two other ICHCAPs in the region. Together with the Centre in Iran we have four in the Region. To reiterate, Asia Pacific has sixty per cent of the world's population. We need more category 2 centres in the region with clear purpose and each one complementing the other and working together. We need to be more inclusive of the Pacific Island countries.

Ninety per cent of people in the Pacific are indigenous with the world's largest density of language heritage. The Pacific is often called the aquatic continent covering almost a third of the world's waters. The ICH element, Voka Mona, a major UNESCO Project, and now the theme of a travelling exhibition, seamlessly brings them together into a unique conglomeration of Island countries addressing ICH and its diversity in the Pacific.

The Conference itself is a major achievement Mr Seong Yong Park. We extend our heartfelt appreciation once again to you and to your staff for pulling it off as an interactive and engaging activity. ICHCAP has provided great opportunity for us to interrogate the ICH Convention and its application, especially after the first inscription of ICH elements on the Urgent Safeguarding and Representative Lists in Abu Dhabi last month. As Mr Park emphasised in his keynote speech, information sharing and strategic networking are critical for promoting safeguarding of ICH in the Asia Pacific. In doing so he asked us to build on our experiences in dealing with the range of standards setting instruments such as Conventions, Treaties, Charters, Declarations and Recommendations. ICHCAP and its sister Category 2 Centres have a critical role in capacity building. We look forward to collective action and cooperation and coordination for safeguarding the ICH of the Region as the common heritage of humanity. Thank you.