

Summary of the 1st Conference of Parties to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions

Paris, UNESCO Headquarters, June 18-20, 2007

The first Conference of the 57 States Parties to the Convention (that is, of the 56 States that had ratified the convention on or before its March 18 entry into force, as well as the European Commission) was held in the presence of numerous observers, notably from the coalitions for cultural diversity. The officially registered delegation of the International Liaison Committee consisted of Jim McKee and Solange Drouin of the Canadian Coalition for Cultural Diversity, Cécile Despringre of the French Coalition, Sergio Navatta of the Uruguayan Coalition, and Mané Nett of the Chilean Coalition. However, several other coalitions were present as well, whether as part of their national delegations, or representing other NGOs: Beat Sanchi, Diego Gradis and Mathias Knauer of the Swiss Coalition, Giacomo Mazzone of the Italian Coalition, Christine Merkel of the German Coalition and Kodjo Nounsouglo of the Togolese Coalition.

The purpose of this first Conference of Parties was to establish the operational and monitoring organs of the Convention. Under the chairmanship of Kader Asmal, who chaired the intergovernmental negotiations on the convention from September 2004 to June 2005, the Conference of Parties started by adopting its own rules of procedure.

Adoption of the Rules of Procedure

One key issue addressed by the rules of procedure concerns the treatment of NGOs. The States Parties agreed on language that grants the status of observer at the Conference of Parties specifically to “non-governmental organizations with interests and activities within the scope of the convention” [translation]. These NGOs “may be invited by the Conference of Parties to take part in the Conference work, without voting right, at all sessions, one session, or a given meeting within a session, upon written request to the Director-General of UNESCO” [translation].

The Rules of Procedure also established the principles of geographic distribution and rotation of the 24 Parties elected to the Intergovernmental Committee: the elections took place based on the composition of UNESCO’s six electoral groups, and the distribution of seats was prorated to the number of State Parties within each group, with a minimum of three seats and a maximum of six seats being granted to each group.

Given that only two States from the Asia were eligible to attend the Conference (India and China) and that the Arab States also had low representation, an agreement was reached to allocate seats from these zones to other zones that have significantly higher levels of ratification. This arrangement will stand until the next Conference of Parties (scheduled to take place in June of 2009).

Accordingly, group I (Western Europe and North America) obtained seven seats, group II (Eastern Europe) obtained four seats, group III (Central and South America) obtained four seats, group IV (Asia) two seats, group Va (Africa) five seats and group Vb (Arab countries) two seats, with the understanding that at the next session of the Conference of the Parties, group I would yield one seat to group IV and group Va would yield one seat to group Vb.

The Rules of Procedure also organized a random draw to determine which twelve member States of the Intergovernmental Committee (half) would be given a limited mandate of two years—as opposed to four years—to allow for the renewal of half of the seats every two

years. To implement the rotation principle, the Rules of Procedure specified that, in principle, members could not be elected for two consecutive mandates (three exceptions are provided for, including one that enables those countries that have drawn only two-year mandates to stand for election for a second term).

Election of the Intergovernmental Committee

The Conference of Parties proceeded to elect State Parties to the Intergovernmental Committee. The following States were elected:

Group I: Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Finland (two years), Canada (two years), Austria (two years) and France (two years).

Group II: Croatia, Lithuania, Albania (two years) and Slovenia (two years).

Group III: Mexico, St. Lucia, Guatemala (two years) and Brazil (two years).

Group IV: India and China (two years).

Group Va: Senegal, South Africa, Mauritius, Mali (two years) and Burkina Faso (two years).

Group Vb: Oman and Tunisia (two years).

International Fund for Cultural Diversity

With respect to the Fund, the Conference of Parties went no further than adopting a resolution mandating the Intergovernmental Committee to submit to it for approval at its next session a draft policy on the use of fund resources, setting out priorities and terms for the latter.

In their opening statements, a number of Parties announced their intention to make an initial contribution to the fund.

With a view to studying the fund's resources and its possible use for international cooperation, UNESCO is organizing a meeting of experts in Madrid in July to stimulate the Intergovernmental Committee's discussions.

Date and Time of Upcoming Meetings

The Conference of Parties decided to call its regular sessions every two years around the month of June and not at the time of UNESCO's General Conference. The second regular session of the Conference of Parties is accordingly scheduled for June 2009.

In the meantime, the Intergovernmental Committee is scheduled to meet four times: in December 2007, in May 2008, in September 2008 and in the spring of 2009. It was decided that the meetings would, as a general rule, take place in Paris. However, due to its inaugural nature, the Conference of Parties accepted Canada's invitation to hold the first meeting of the Committee on December 10, 2007, in Ottawa.

NGO Participation

It was very difficult for NGOs to express themselves before the Conference of the Parties. While the coalitions had submitted a written request to speak prior to the Conference, the Chair ultimately only granted shared speaking time on behalf of all NGOs on the second day, forcing them to agree on a common statement at the very last minute. Solange Drouin, Vice-President of the Canadian Coalition, delivered the intervention on behalf of the organizations present: International Network for Cultural Diversity (INCD), European Broadcast Union (EBU), The International Theatre Institute, International Music Council, International Council of Museums (ICOM), International Federation of Musicians (FIM), Traditions for Tomorrow and the International Liaison Committee of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (ILC).

The real work to implement the convention is now in the hands of the Intergovernmental Committee. And it is now up to the Coalitions to work with the Parties elected to this Committee to secure better channels for working with the Committee, and thereby help to ensure a quick, consistent and effective implementation of the convention.