

THE INTERNATIONAL LIAISON COMMITTEE OF COALITIONS FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY (ILC)

(Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Chad, Chile, Colombia, Congo, Ecuador, France, Gabon, Germany, Guinea, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast, Republic of Korea, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, New Zealand, Nigeria, Paraguay, Peru, Senegal, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, Uruguay and Venezuela)

STATEMENT FIRST CONFERENCE OF PARTIES TO THE UNESCO CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS (June 18-20, 2007)

The Coalitions for Cultural Diversity, representing the cultural professional organizations of 38 countries around the world, salute the historic moment signaled by this first Conference of Parties to launch the process of implementing the UNESCO Convention on the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions.

The rapid progress of the ratification campaign for the Convention has resulted in the minimum threshold of 30 ratifications being surpassed in time to enable the entry into force of this Convention and now the holding of this first Conference of 57 States Parties just 18 months after the Convention was adopted.

This first Conference of Parties will serve to put in place the mechanisms and bodies of the Convention (internal rules of procedure, election of the Intergovernmental Committee, the mandate for operational directives, etc.) and will set the stage for the Intergovernmental Committee to begin its work.

Engagement of Civil Society

As part of civil society, the Coalitions for Cultural Diversity, which played an active role in alerting States and governments to the need for such a Convention, supported its elaboration by UNESCO and played an active role in the intergovernmental negotiations process that resulted in the text that was ultimately adopted, very much wish to continue our involvement as we now head into the implementation process.

The campaign for the Convention has resulted in an unprecedented mobilization of cultural professional organizations around the world. The very positive energies represented by this mobilization should now be channeled into the implementation of the Convention—both at the state and country level by governments, as well as through the work of this Conference. This implies the participation of the Coalitions in an observer capacity at the Conference of Parties and the Intergovernmental Committee, the International Fund for Cultural Diversity and any other mechanisms that may be established in the process of making this Convention operational.

To strengthen its capacity to engage in these processes, the member coalitions of the International Liaison Committee of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity (ILC) agreed at their Ninth General Assembly in Montreal in March of 2007 to launch the process for transforming the ILC into an International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity. Once established, the Federation will seek official status at UNESCO on a priority basis so that it can work to protect and promote cultural diversity within the framework of UNESCO as well as in all other appropriate forums.

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International Fund for Cultural Diversity

We consider it a priority that the International Fund for Cultural Diversity be made operational as quickly as possible. This Fund is an essential instrument for realizing the international cooperation objectives of the Convention, in particular by supporting initiatives to assist developing countries in implementing cultural policies and supporting the development of their domestic cultural industries.

For the Fund to carry out this mission, it must be properly resourced. We urge all countries—in particular countries from the developed world—to make significant contributions to the Fund on a recurring basis.

Continuing the Ratification Campaign

We urge all States that have not yet ratified the Convention to do so as quickly as possible. Achieving the broadest possible ratification of the Convention, from all regions of the world, will be key to realizing the full legal and political potential of the Convention. The work must continue to promote broader ratification. We believe that a quick and effective implementation of the Convention will greatly assist these efforts.

Implementation of the Convention at the National Level

The Coalitions for Cultural Diversity emphasize that a crucial stage of implementing the Convention will take place at the national level. We therefore urge all States Parties to exercise the right they have affirmed in this Convention by putting in place policies that ensure their citizens have access to a diversity of cultural expressions originating from within their own borders as well as internationally.

Threats to Cultural Diversity

As the Convention enters into its active phase for the States Parties that have ratified it, it should be recognized that ongoing trade negotiations continue to place pressure on many countries to liberalize their audiovisual and cultural services. Today, the danger is less from the Doha Round of WTO organizations than from an array of bilateral talks in which in many cases developing countries are being pressured by far more powerful trading partners to renounce their right to cultural policies.

It is therefore essential that Articles 20 and 21 of the Convention seeking to promote the Convention's objectives, principles and obligations in other international forums be applied as quickly as possible. This work should be included as part of the initial priorities of the Intergovernmental Committee.

Finally, should the Intergovernmental Committee's work on the operational guidelines for the International Fund for Cultural Diversity present the possibility of making the Fund operational prior to the second Conference of Parties currently scheduled for June 2009, the Coalitions for Cultural Diversity would strongly support the holding of an Extraordinary Conference of Parties at the earliest opportunity to enable this pillar of the Convention to be launched as quickly as possible.