

States Parties and Civil Society partnerships

NGOs' recommendations to the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions 1st Extraordinary Session - June 24-27, 2008

The partnership between States Parties and civil society is entering into a new phase highlighted by the 1st Exchange Session, held on the 23rd of June 2008 in Paris, at the request of the Intergovernmental Committee at its First Ordinary Session held in Ottawa in December 2007. At this Exchange Session, around 100 delegates from NGOs participated, representing many thousands of artists, authors, cultural industry professionals, cultural and media institutions, development organizations, and academics from around the world. More or less the same number of States representatives took part in the Exchange Session.

NGOs shared with States examples of best practices on what they are doing to raise awareness of the Convention and to encourage additional ratifications. There was discussion of practical ways the Convention should or could be implemented. Important exchanges took place on the need to improve the status of the artist and to develop communication strategies to promote the objectives of the Convention.

During this fruitful Exchange Session, a number of recommendations emerged regarding the role and obligations of civil society, and the framework in which NGOs should participate in the decision-making organs of the Convention, including the Conference of States Parties and the Intergovernmental Committee, as provided for particularly in Article 11 of the Convention and in the Rules of Procedure governing these organs. Unique in UNESCO instruments, Article 11 is as strong a commitment encouraging partnership with civil society as can be found in any international instrument. Thus, the civil society representatives seek to meet or exceed existing best practices in the UN system.

Civil society representatives note that the Convention's implementation is a process, and are offering the following recommendations at this time:

1. **DEFINITION/ACCREDITATION:** For the purposes of defining civil society in the context of the Convention, NGOs are intermediaries between the strictly defined states institutions and organisms, and the private sector. Official accreditation should be granted to NGOs that bring together individuals, firms, associations, non-governmental institutions, others involved in the cultural continuum including academics who study the sector.
2. **CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION:** Official accreditation should be granted by the Secretariat for a period of four years after which it can be reviewed. To be eligible, NGOs should demonstrate that:
 - a. they have an interest and activities in the fields covered by the Convention,
 - b. they have a regional or global presence,
 - c. they are representative of their constituency, and
 - d. they have been active for a minimum of four years.

To deal with these issues, the Secretariat will need to obtain the input of NGOs, perhaps with the operational involvement of the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee.

3. RIGHTS OF ACCREDITED NGOS: The rights that would be granted to the accredited NGOs should be the following:
 - a. to attend the Conference of Parties and Intergovernmental Committee sessions,
 - b. to propose that items of special interest be placed on the provisional agenda of the Intergovernmental Committee,
 - c. to speak at an appropriate time on each agenda topic, including upon request of State parties in the course of the discussions, and in any case before decisions are taken, consistent with the model applied at the First Ordinary Session of the Intergovernmental Committee,
 - d. to submit a written statement relevant to the work of the Conference or the Intergovernmental Committee, which shall, subject to rules established by these governing bodies, be circulated to all members by the Secretariat.
4. EXCHANGE SESSIONS: The June 23 Exchange Session should serve as the model for further exchanges with accredited NGOs prior to each Conference of Parties and session of the Intergovernmental Committee. These exchanges, which topic and agenda will have been decided in consultation with such organizations, would provide an opportunity for views and proposals from NGOs to be expressed before the formal debates of the Conference of Parties and Intergovernmental Committee take place.
5. INFORMAL EXPERTS' COMMITTEE: The informal experts' committee (rather than a network, as envisaged in paragraph 17 of the working paper on civil society, CE/08/1.EXT.IGC/5) should be composed of 10 delegates elected by and from accredited NGOs. One of the first mandates for this committee should be to conduct a benchmarking exercise examining best practice models of engaging civil society in the work of governing bodies of other United Nations organizations, as well as developing innovative approaches tailored to the specific challenges of implementing the 2005 Convention. This committee could serve as a liaison between accredited NGOs, the Secretariat and governing bodies of the Convention.
6. PARTICIPATION ON WORKING COMMITTEES: When establishing a working committee to consider any aspect of the Convention, the Conference of Parties or the Intergovernmental Committee shall invite one or more representatives of NGOs to serve on the Committee. These representatives should be elected by and from among the informal experts' committee as proposed in Paragraph 5.
7. PARTICIPATION IN THE INTERNATIONAL FUND: On any committee established to oversee program design, delivery and evaluation of the International Fund for Cultural Diversity, two representatives of NGOs shall be elected by and from among the informal experts' Committee as proposed in Paragraph 5. These delegates shall have voice and vote at all sessions of such committees.
8. RIGHT TO APPLY TO THE FUND: NGOs shall have the right to apply directly, and without State sponsorship, for funding from the International Fund.
9. FUNDRAISING FOR THE INTERNATIONAL FUND: NGOs will collaborate in seeking additional funds for the International Fund from private sector sources. Providing a decision-making role for the relevant NGOs in the activities of the International Fund will facilitate this effort.