


The Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP
Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
100 Parliament St,
London
SW1A 2BQ
United Kingdom


19 January 2022

Dear Secretary of State

RATIFICATION OF UNESCO'S 2003 CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

I am writing as the President of ICOMOS-UK about the ratification of the 2003 Convention by the United Kingdom.

I understand that the Government continues to explore ratification of the Convention by the UK. As things stand, the UK is one of only thirteen countries out of 180 Member States to UNESCO that has yet to ratify Convention. As you will know, there have been a number of questions raised in Parliament about the UK's position on this and the reasons for the delay in adopting the Convention. ICOMOS-UK and its Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Committee which I chair has been involved in the promotion of ICH since 2012 and the 2003 Convention has provided the framework for this work. We are strongly of the view that there are now excellent grounds for UK ratification of the 2003 Convention.

In December last year ICOMOS-UK led an on-line Round Table meeting for key ICH stakeholders from across the UK. The event was the latest in the series of events delivered during the last decade. The purpose was to engage in a focussed exploration of the public's mood about ratification processes and the various options available to Member States of UNESCO. 60 participants were involved in the discussion including bearers/practicing communities, civil society organisations, the three devolved governments and their cultural heritage agencies, UNESCO National Commission, DDCMS, national, ethnic and religious minorities, academics and funding agencies.

At the event, UNESCO's ICH Secretariat, based in Paris, set out the obligations of the Convention for States Parties followed by presentations from four European nations: The Netherlands, Sweden,

Norway and Malta who outlined their approaches to ratification and lessons for the UK. Views from UK panellists on public mood and appropriate models of ratification for the UK and a discussion by all attendees concluded the day. The outcome of the Round Table discussions in the form of key recommendations are briefly summarised at **Annex A** to this letter and are forwarded to you to inform any future consideration of the UK's position regarding the 2003 Convention.

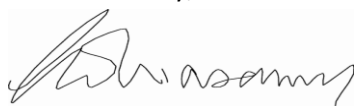
You will be aware that much of UK's heritage is in the form of ICH and held in the community by individuals and groups. The rituals, customs, traditions and skills knowledge practiced from dawn to sunset, daily and seasonally evolve constantly in the process of transmission to future generations. It is the only cultural heritage that many of UK's marginalised communities know, cherish and celebrate in their homes and local environment and therefore contributes to the Government's access to culture and levelling up agendas.

Sadly, many practices have either disappeared or in danger of being lost due to lack of awareness about the value of ICH, social, economic and environmental reasons and the lack of formal recognition of its status as heritage that the tangible heritage enjoys. Many local and historic skills and knowledge and practices need safeguarding and have the potential to yield significant financial benefits, especially generated from crafts, food and culinary practices, festivals, performing arts and tourism, combat the effects of climate change and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

ICOMOS-UK believes that ratification would give the UK an opportunity to influence the development and implementation of this relatively young and rapidly evolving Convention, and the opportunity to share our unique living heritages with an international network of nations. ICH is essential to bring the nation's collections, historic buildings and landscapes alive and meaningful through peoples' collective stories, meanings and memories and knowledge. However, our work with the museums sector has shown there is still a low level of awareness of ICH among stewards and custodians and other disciplines engaged in conservation practices. Funding agencies are yet to integrate ICH into all streams and at present ACE's ten years strategy does not include ICH and ratification would help to enhance the current NLHF funding for community projects.

I am pleased to be able to share our views with you and trust that they will be helpful in any forthcoming discussions on the UK's ratification of the 2003 Convention. ICOMOS-UK has significant knowledge and experience of ICH and the Convention. We are the only charitable heritage organisation which works with all five Domains listed by UNESCO and we would welcome the opportunity to work with your department on the promotion of ICH in the context of future ratification.

Yours sincerely,



Clara Arokiasamy
President, ICOMOS-UK

Annex A

Roundtable Meeting on Ratification of UNESCO's 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in the UK 1st December 2021

Key Recommendations

1. The establishment of a national inventory of ICH, a key obligation of the Convention, taking into account the varying levels of progress that have been made in each of the devolved nations and England and one that encourages the continuation of local and regional sub inventorying. The protection of the ICH communities right to defining and deciding which of their living heritages and customs and practices are safeguarded, a cornerstone of the Convention, should underpin the process. The inventory should be established regardless of ratification in order to raise awareness and help prevent the loss of some of the nation's rich heritage critical for community cohesion and the formulation of identities.
2. That the government should share with bearers/practicing individuals and communities and the wider public the reasons for non- ratification which would help with the development of a mutual understanding of the Government's concerns and give the communities an opportunity to explain and thereby dispel any myths and allay anxieties which act as barriers to the adoption of the Convention.
3. That the UK should ratify the 2003 Convention as soon as possible. A unique approach to ratification would be needed to reflect UK's political structures comprising devolved nations, Overseas Territories and national minorities and its super diverse demography resulting from historical connections with the rest of the globe, recent migration and fusion of cultures resulting from the evolving nature of ICH and society.