

## Safeguarding Pioneers

### Pacific Islands Museums Association

*Working together, preserving, celebrating, and nurturing the heritage of the peoples of the Pacific Islands*

Tarisi Vunidilo (Secretary-General, Pacific Islands Museums Association)



Young ni-Vanuatu girl trying out a sand drawing activity at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre in Port Vila (Photo by Tarisi Vunidilo)



Discussion among members of PIMA (Photo by ICHCAP/B. Cha)

The Pacific Islands Museums Association (PIMA) is a regional, non-governmental organisation that assists museums, cultural centres, national trusts, cultural departments and ministries, cultural associations, and arts councils. PIMA acknowledges the richness of the Pacific's ICH and has undertaken some successful initiatives to support ICH safeguarding.

PIMA was established in 1994 as a regional forum where heritage professionals could exchange their views and work towards improving the quality of service provided to the public. It is the first and only regional, multilingual, multicultural, non-profit organisation that assists museums, cultural centres, and people to preserve Pacific heritage.

PIMA develops community participation in heritage management and brings together over forty-five museums and cultural centres in the Pacific to develop their capacity to identify research, manage, interpret, and nurture cultural and natural heritage. PIMA advocates the development of regional cultural resource management policies and practices, facilitates training, and provides a forum to exchange ideas and skills. It provides and encourages regional and global linkages to support heritage safeguarding. In this article, PIMA highlights a case study on initiatives that PIMA fully supported in Vanuatu as one of its ICH safeguarding activities.

The Malampa Regional Sand Drawing Festival, held in Sesivi, West Ambrym, from 11 to 15 May 2008, was a significant cultural event not only

for Vanuatu, but for the whole world. Sponsored by UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust for intangible heritage, the festival demonstrated that this unique ni-Vanuatu tradition is still alive and may indeed be undergoing a revival of interest, given the convergence of around 400 participants.

Aesthetically, the sand drawings are very beautiful, and it was a privilege to witness the great skill and knowledge of the practitioners from all over Vanuatu's islands, as they ritually drew complex designs on the flat black volcanic sands and recited the stories and songs to go with them. However, it is necessary to realize that sand drawings are much more than just pretty geometric patterns or pictures. They are a complex artistic ritual where art, story, and traditional knowledge are interwoven to form a language of memory, place, and community. Sand drawings uniquely express the deep ni-Vanuatu connection to and understanding of the land, conveying a sense of community, identity, and interaction with nature and history that has evolved out of the spirit of the land and the hearts and minds of the people.

To keep this cultural knowledge alive, it is not enough to preserve the outward forms of sand drawings, but rather to continue to regenerate their deeper significance—the stories, rituals, and the symbolic meanings that express the richness of ni-Vanuatu culture and community relations.

Much of the success of the festival was in seeing innovative sand drawings evolve, such as the depictions of Air Vanuatu and the Statue

of Liberty, right alongside older traditional forms such as the *laplap* form from Pentecost. Of particular importance is that so many young people took part in the festival, witnessing and learning from the custodians of this living cultural heritage. For without this intergenerational transmission of knowledge, the future of unique cultural expressions such as sand drawing would indeed be under threat.

While there are plans to incorporate sand drawing as part of the national school curriculum in Vanuatu, to convey a true sense of the richness and breadth of cultural context, festivals such as the one in Ambrym are essential. Locals, participants, and visitors are enriched by the opportunity to make new friends, exchange information and artistic inspiration, renew family connections, and learn new customs, dances, art forms, stories, and music—experiences no classroom can convey.

In this age of intolerance, global conflict, and the stifling of creative diversity by huge multinational corporations and powerful political interests, the need to raise awareness of cultural heritage's value is crucial to bring people closer together in mutual respect and understanding. We need to do everything we can to promote and encourage the rich cultural diversity of humanity, and the continued practice of the arts and culture of Vanuatu gives life to a language that may otherwise be forgotten or undervalued in the headlong rush toward 'modern life' and the age of the mobile phone.



## Safeguarding Measures under the 2003 UNESCO Convention

Our modern age is defined by better technology that allows individuals from disparate cultures to interact with one another effortlessly. While this newfound ability to instantly communicate globally has helped usher in a realisation of a true global village, it also exposes a threat to traditional heritage, especially intangible cultural heritage (ICH). To help ensure the continued viability of ICH, a number of safeguarding measures have been developed. Usually initiated by concerned communities and groups, actions to safeguard ICH are also undergone by government ministries, local authorities, NGOs, and researchers. Regardless of the individuals or organisations that promote safeguarding, it is an understood imperative that actions be developed with the widest possible participation of communities, groups, or individuals directly affected by or involved with the ICH element. In addition, safeguarding efforts should desirably encourage the continued practice and transmission of the ICH element being safeguarded. However, resources required for safeguarding may be limited, so it is necessary to prioritise threats and risks while establishing safeguarding measures. Article 2.3 of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage includes a number of possible safeguarding measures that can be implemented.

### Transmission

When practitioners or other ICH bearers formally or informally pass on practices, skills, knowledge or ideas to others, especially younger generations within the community, they are ensuring a continuation of traditional ways, but while this is a form of transmission, it is not necessarily a safeguarding measure. However, if this continuity is diminished or impaired in some way, then implementing safeguarding measures may be needed to enhance the transmission process. Introducing a more formal mode of transmission in schools is one such method. Teaching children who are from the community where the ICH has traditionally been practiced can help ensure that the practice does not die out. This can be put into practical effect, for example, by simply teaching traditional songs, but other types of curricula may be required for raising general ICH awareness among different communities.

### Revitalisation

To revitalise ICH means to strengthen the ICH and expressions that are seriously threatened.

Under the Convention, the element should have some degree of demonstrable vitality within the concerned community or group; otherwise the element ceases to be ICH and the Convention does not apply. According to the Convention, revitalisation by restoring and strengthening weak or endangered ICH is a fundamental safeguarding measure. However, the resurrection of extinct elements is a form of revival and is outside the scope of the Convention.

### Identify, Define, Inventory, Document, and Research

Naming an ICH element and briefly describing its context to distinguish it from others is, as outlined in the Convention, **identification**. An ICH **definition** differs in that it provides a fuller description of the element as a snapshot at a specific point in time. Identifying and defining ICH should both be done with direct participation of the concerned communities, groups, or individuals.

Following the process of ICH identification and defining is **inventorying**, the systematic collection and presentation of an ICH element. An inventory can be disseminated through any number of media from a simple paper list to a sophisticated multimedia database. Inventorying should only be executed with the consent of the affected communities or groups. States Parties may choose to organise their ICH inventories in any manner that seems most appropriate to them. The goals of these inventories can be manifold, but the two most important aims are to contribute to safeguarding and increasing awareness. Contributing to safeguarding, as a requirement of the Convention, suggests that the state of the inventoried elements' viability be indicated.

Subsequent to making an inventory is the **documentation** process. Documenting consists of recording the current state and varieties of an ICH element and collecting documents that relate to it. Recording can be done through transcription or audio-visual taping or both.

To understand an ICH element or groups of elements better, **research** is required. The course of researching an ICH element is undertaken through a holistic exploration of the element. In addition to examining the element's forms and social, cultural, and economic functions, research includes an investigation into the modes of transmission, artistic and aesthetic features, and history as well as the dynamics involved in the creation and re-creation of the element.

### Preservation and Protection

ICH **preservation**, according to the convention, does not imply the practice of the element cannot transform over time, but rather that the communities and bearers maintain continuity in the practice as time passes. Deliberate measures often undertaken by official bodies to defend ICH elements from the threat of discontinued practice fall under the category of **protection**. This danger of discontinuation can be either perceived or actual.

### Awareness-Raising, Promotion, and Enhancement

Encouraging concerned parties to recognise the value of ICH, respect the element, and, if possible, take measures to ensure its viability is **awareness-raising**. Two tools for raising awareness are **promotion** and **enhancement**. These means aim at increasing the value attached to an element, both inside and outside the concerned communities. Promotion takes the form of piquing the public's interest in the various aspects of ICH while enhancement promotes the status and function of ICH.

\*This article refers to the UNESCO Convention (2003), Operational Directives (2010), documents for the Training of Trainers Programmes, and UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage website: [www.unesco.org/culture/ich/](http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/).

### Editorial Advisory Board of the ICH Courier Launched

In September 2011, the Editorial Advisory Board was launched to ensure the quality and reliability of the newsletter contents. The Board Members were selected by considering regional balance among the five sub-regions in the Asia-Pacific region. They serve active roles as the Advisory Board by providing the *ICH Courier* with comments on yearly and quarterly plans of the newsletter; comments on and monitoring of articles, structure, and layout; ideas on the newsletter; and recommendations of experts. The Editorial Advisory Board Members will perform their duty until December 2012.

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(in alphabetical order)



## [Central Asia] Regional Meeting of Central Asian National Commissions for UNESCO

The regional meeting of the Central Asian National Commissions for UNESCO was held in Astana, Republic of Kazakhstan, on 5 and 6 September 2011. The meeting was organised by the Kazakhstan National Commission for UNESCO in collaboration with the UNESCO Cluster Office in Almaty.

In the spirit of promoting mutual support, the meeting mainly focused on strengthening cooperation among National Commissions for UNESCO with the intent of increasing cooperation efficiency, sharing best practices, and improving cooperation among national authorities and UNESCO field offices.

More than a hundred participants from National Commissions; UNESCO ASPNets; and UNESCO Clubs, Centres, and Associations were in attendance to discuss UNESCO-related issues such as tangible and intangible culture. In particular, during the breakout session for the cultural sector, participants actively discussed issues on the Silk Road, focusing on an integrated approach to safeguard tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

Following the meeting, a recommendation was adopted to promote UNESCO initiatives in the region.



Regional meeting of UNESCO National Commissions in Central Asia © UNESCO Almaty

## [Japan] Opening Ceremony of the International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific

The International Research Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage in the Asia-Pacific (IRCI), a UNESCO Category 2 Centre, was established on 3 October 2011 in Sakai, Osaka, Japan. The Governing Board Meeting was held with attendees from representatives of relevant Japanese organisations, UNESCO and its category 2 centres in the Republic of Korea and China.

The IRCI also held an opening ceremony with invited participants from the Agency for Cultural Affairs in Japan and category 2 centres in the ROK and China. The event

commenced with an opening memorial reception and an inaugural symposium. The inaugural symposium was under the subject of 'Promotion and Transmission of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Danger', and the panel of experts was made up of Sam-Ang Sam, ethnomusicologist from Cambodia; Natan Itonga, Cultural Officer from the Culture Center and Museum, Kiribati; and Yamaji Kozo, folklorist from Japan. At the reception, ICHCAP presented a replica of the Sacred Bell of King Seongdeok the Great to the IRCI as a symbol of friendship, and both centres pledged to complement each other while making efforts to safeguard intangible cultural heritage in Asia and the Pacific region.



Opening ceremony of the IRCI (Photo by ICHCAP)

## [NGO] International Forum for the UNESCO-Accredited NGOs of ICH

The Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation, with the support of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea, organised and hosted an international forum on 13 and 14 October 2011 at the Korea House in Seoul.

This forum marks the first time UNESCO-Accredited NGOs in Asia gathered to discuss their roles as advisory NGOs for furthering cooperation in the ICH safeguarding field. It consisted of three sessions under the general theme, The Importance of UNESCO-Accredited NGOs of ICH, and their Roles and Cooperation Measures to Construct Network. The three session themes were 1) The UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH and the Role of NGOs, 2) Introduction of Asian UNESCO-Accredited NGOs' Activities for the Safeguarding of ICH, and 3) NGOs' Prospects and Cooperation Measures for the Safeguarding of ICH.

There were about thirty participants— UNESCO-Accredited NGOs from China, India, Mongolia, Viet Nam, and the Republic of Korea; the UNESCO Office in Bangkok; cultural heritage experts and scholars and government officials from the Republic of Korea.

Over two days, the forum provided a

platform to discuss ways to share experiences and knowledge, and the participants talked at length about their roles and responsibilities as well as the widely diverse environments in which they work and the challenges they expect to face in the years ahead.



International forum for UNESCO-Accredited NGOs of ICH © CHF

## [Pacific Islands] 4th Pacific World Heritage Workshop

The 4th Pacific World Heritage Workshop was held in Apia from 5 to 9 September 2011. Hosted by the Government of Samoa, it brought together some seventy participants and experts from inside and outside the Pacific region.

The workshop provided an opportunity for participants to discuss issues and challenges on the World Heritage Programme across the Pacific, including integrated applications of international conventions.

Noted during the workshop was the growing interest in the ways World Heritage activities intersect with other natural and cultural conventions. In the culture sector, the participants reaffirmed the relationship between tangible and intangible cultural heritage (ICH), which is very clearly expressed in the Pacific where cultural heritage includes strong oral traditions and community stories. As such, dialogue on cultural heritage in the Pacific involves broad discussions on ICH safeguarding and community empowerment. The participants requested to include these aspects in the updated Pacific World Heritage Action Plan.

The outcome of the workshop, will be finalised and reported at the World Heritage Committee meeting planned for July 2012. [Source: UNESCO Office in APIA]

## [Brunei Darussalam] Ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH

Culture of Brunei is quite diverse, deriving from its historical links with the Hindu empire and modern-day Indonesia and

Malaysia. The nation's Malay Islamic Monarchy has developed from Brunei merging Malay culture with the teachings of Islam, and therefore it represents both its monarchy and the people of Brunei.

Brunei is richly endowed with intangible cultural heritage that the government and the people have worked tirelessly to maintain. The nation's Arts and Handicraft Centre, for example, is a living testimony to the preservation and the proliferation of the arts and crafts for which Brunei was once renowned, including boat making, silversmithing, bronze tooling, weaving and basketry. Visitors will also find Malay weaponry, wood carvings, traditional games, traditional musical instruments, *silat* (the traditional art of self-defence), and decorative items for women as Brunei's most unique cultural offerings.

Brunei is expected to meet its obligations to safeguard intangible cultural heritage and, therefore, benefit from the opportunities and mechanisms of international cooperation created under the Convention.

[Source: UNESCO Office in Jakarta]

#### [ROK] Special Exhibition of Important ICH of Korea at UNESCO Headquarters

The Special Exhibition of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage, hosted by the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea and the Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Korea to UNESCO and supervised by the Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation, was held from 19 to 28 September 2011 at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France. This exhibition was also planned to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea. The opening ceremony was held at Miro Hall, with participants from the host organisations and UNESCO. Celebrating the opening of the exhibition, there was a performance of Gayageum Byeongchang, a choral arrangement accompanied by a Korean twelve-string zither. Following the opening ceremony, the ICH holder of Mokjogakjang (wood sculpting), Important Intangible Cultural Properties No. 108, impressed the audience by carving a Korean camellia in the shape of man and woman smiling. Under the theme of *Dreaming with Nature*, this exhibition included eighty-nine pieces made by ICH practitioners, such as holders, apprentices, and graduates. Above this, Korean traditional crafts were on display through various programs, showing the artistic value of Korean traditional crafts.



Special Exhibition of Important Intangible Cultural Heritage of Korea © Korea Cultural Heritage Foundation

#### [Indonesia] Regional Seminar on Safeguarding ICH and Diversity of Cultural Expressions

The Department of Cultural Values, Arts and Film of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Indonesia held the 'Regional Seminar on Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage, and Diversity of Cultural Expressions' in Jakarta on 4 and 5 October 2011. Expert speakers from China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, and Viet Nam made presentations to an audience of over 100 delegates, including government officials, NGOs, members of ICH communities, and the media. The seminar was organised into four different but topically related sessions: 1) Safeguarding ICH, based on the UNESCO 2003 Convention; 2) Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions, based on the UNESCO 2005 Convention; 3) Intellectual Property Rights Related to Cultural Heritage; and 4) Information on the 6th Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee for Safeguarding ICH that will be held in Bali between 22 and 29 November 2011.



Regional Seminar in Jakarta (Photo by ICHCAP)

#### [Thailand] 2011 Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Field School

In order to build capacity for ICH safeguarding in community-based cultural research, every year since 2009, the Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre in Thailand has offered a two-week intensive training program.

This year's Field School was held from 8 to 21 August 2011, and it had a total of nine trainers and twenty-one participants from eight countries in the region. Lecture topics included Debates and Critiques of the 2003 ICH Convention; New Museology and Eco-museums; and Anthropological Frameworks

and Methods for Inventorying, Researching, Documenting, Promoting, Transmitting, and Revitalising Intangible Culture.

A key component of the Field School is the working group practicum, which affords participants the opportunity to work with local communities to apply their newly gained concepts and tools for safeguarding intangible culture. This year's field practicum focused on the audiovisual documentation of intangible heritage, and each of the four groups worked in close collaboration with their assigned communities to produce a short film featuring one element of intangible cultural heritage.

The films produced as part of the 2011 Field School can be viewed at the ICH and Museums website: <http://www.sac.or.th/databases/fieldschool/>

[Source: Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre]



2011 Intangible Cultural Heritage and Museums Field School © SAC

## ICH COURIER

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#### ADDRESS

132 Munji-ro, Yuseong-gu, Daejeon 305-380 Republic of Korea

TEL +82 42 820 3508

FAX +82 42 820 3500

EMAIL [info@ichcap.org](mailto:info@ichcap.org)

WEBSITE [www.ichcap.org](http://www.ichcap.org)

EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER Seong-Yong Park

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Seong-Yong Park

#### EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Sudha Gopalakrishnan, Alisher Ikramov, Roger L. Janelli, Gaura Mancacaritadipura, Akatsuki Takahashi

EDITORIAL STAFF Weonmo Park, Milee Choi, Boyoung Cha, Michael Peterson

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