

IMC WORLD FORUM ON MUSIC 2009  
SESSION 1: UNESCO CONVENTION AND MUSICAL DIVERSITY  
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As the world's peak global music organisation, the International Music Council must be interested in all the musics of the world. A commitment to musical diversity is central to its purpose. It's in the IMC's DNA. This is why it has such a special interest in the new UNESCO Convention.

In 2007, the UNESCO General Assembly brought into being the Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, more generally known as the Convention for Cultural Diversity.

I first became involved in the process that led to the Convention when in 1999, I attended a conference of an NGO, the International Network for Cultural Diversity. My perceptions of what was a very complex process come from there and of course they may be faulty. But in my understanding, the impetus for this convention came initially from non-governmental organisations such as the International Network for Cultural Diversity, the INCD for short, and the more industry-orientated Coalition for Cultural Diversity, of course their members from across the globe, and their government backers, especially the Canadian government. The INCD met regularly with an international conference of cultural ministers, called the International Network for Cultural Policy, and had a role in persuading it to take up the cause. I believe that it was that ministerial body that decided to approach UNESCO to be the host for the Convention. In conversation a couple of nights ago, our first speaker, Jukka Liedes, brought another perspective and perhaps he will want to tell you of his experience.

For many of us in the cultural sector, there was an urgency for action. The prerogatives of governments in supporting their own cultural sectors were being seriously challenged through the negotiation of free trade agreements, especially those with the United States of America as a party. The USA regarded government regulations designed to protect local cultures as incursions upon its right to free access to markets for its music, film and television productions. In a succession of bilateral trade negotiations, it has had considerable success in limiting the cultural rights of its trade treaty partners, or to use the current terminology, their cultural sovereignty. Through its wealth and weight, it is in a position to exert great pressure on its negotiating partners. For their part, they were pretty much little guys out on their

own and without support from any international agreement in defending their cultural rights.

So the UNESCO Convention was devised as what is called a 'normative instrument'. It would give an internationally agreed basis upon which culture could be defended against the incursions of free trade agreements. It is a measure of the level of feeling behind this issue that the Convention was voted in with 148 countries in favour, four abstentions, and only two against: the USA and Israel. It will be interesting to see whether the Convention does become a useful defence for culture in the negotiation of international trade agreements.

Assuming that countries retain their rights to support their own cultures, to what should they apply these rights? The message from the Convention is this: support cultural diversity within your borders, support it in other countries, and support it by facilitating cross-border cultural exchanges. It especially urges support to the capacity of developing countries to promote cultural diversity and sets up an international fund in order to assist.

So now we have had the Convention in place for a couple of years. What is being done by UNESCO, by governments, and by the cultural sector to implement its recommendations? In this session, we will hear reports from an interesting variety of sources about various initiatives and projects. In devising this session, I was not necessarily looking for actions that resulted directly from the establishment of the Convention for Cultural Diversity. Canada, for instance, has had official policies in support of multiculturalism for decades before the Convention was thought of. So our speakers will tell us about various initiatives that serve the objectives of the Convention, whether or not they set out with that purpose.

A quick overview. We hear first from Jukka Liedes from Finland, who was the chairperson of the UNESCO Drafting Committee that was responsible for writing the Convention. He is followed by our friend Garry Neil from Canada, director of the International Network for Cultural Diversity, who offers an outside observer's perceptions of the actions to date from UNESCO and others.

Next to national cultural policies. We hear from Timothy Maloney, now head of the music library for the University of Minnesota, but a long time participant in cultural matters in Canada, about its multicultural policies, and then from the Director of the new City of Culture in Tunis,

Mohamed Zinelabidine, about musical diversity policies in Tunisia. Then the IMC Secretary General, Silja Fischer, will give a brief account of IMC's advocacy within UNESCO on the Convention.

The European Community is a signatory to the Convention. And yet, some of its member states, so far from supporting all of the recommendations, are actively blocking cross-border cultural activities. Ole Reitov, Program Director of Freemuse in Copenhagen, has brought this situation to light and will give us some details.

The International Music Council is a partner in a large research project, named Sustainable Futures, to identify strategies by which traditional musics can be rescued and revitalised. Its Research Officer, Myfany Turpin, is here from Australia to tell us about the project.

To finish, we hear from three IMC member organisations. Adepo Yapo will tell us about an international program to support and promote an African traditional instrument, the balophon. He is the Director for Cooperation and Research of the Regional Cultural Action Centre in Lomae, Togo, and comes from the Cote d'Ivoire. Valentina Diaz Frenot, President of the National Music Council of Paraguay, will tell us of a very constructive music education project of the IMC regional council in Latin America. Finally, Wouter Turkenberg of the Netherlands will tell us about that country's efforts to find its response to the Convention.

So by the end of this session, you will know more than almost anyone about the ramifications and outcomes of the Convention for Cultural Diversity.