

UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity

Adoption: The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was adopted by the UNESCO on 2 November 2001. It was adopted following the report of Commission IV (Commission on Culture) at the 20th plenary meeting of the 31st session of the General Conference.

As a declaration, this text aims to define norms and therefore, does not require ratifications. A declaration sets forward principles and values which will be recognised by the international community as having a greater authority on the matter. Even if declarations are not binding as treaties and conventions, they underline strong expectations to which Member States should abide. Declarations are usually adopted through a resolution by the General Conference.

Summary information

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity sets forward some principles and standards helping Member States to promote cultural diversity within their national jurisdiction and on the international level. The Declaration underlines the importance of cultural rights and right to diversity set forward in international legal instruments such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. Throughout its articles, the Declaration describes general principles to help the Member States promoting cultural diversity. The Annex II suggests concrete objectives to Member States for an action plan in the implementation of the Declaration.

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was adopted during the 31st session of the General Conference in 2001. During the 33rd session, the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression was adopted, and entered into force in 2007. The 2005 Convention reinforces the Declaration by setting forward legal principles and standards to promote cultural diversity and varieties of expressions.

During the 31st session of the General Conference of the UNESCO, Canada spoke in favour of adopting the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. On 28 November 2005, Canada has also accepted the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

History

The Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was adopted on 2 November 2001 during the 31st session of the General Conference of the UNESCO. In its preamble, the Declaration recalls the importance of cultural human rights and diversity as set forward in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 22 and 27) and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (Article 15). It reiterated the importance of “the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity” in the achievement of justice, liberty, and peace.

Before the adoption of the Declaration, an experts committee met on 21-22 September 2000 to discuss how the UNESCO could strengthen its role in promoting cultural diversity in the context of globalization. Informal consultations with Member States were held a few months before from 4 April to 15 May 2000. From May to July 2001, an ad hoc working group was implemented by the UNESCO’s Executive Board to help the Secretariat drafting the text of the Declaration on cultural diversity. The Declaration was finally adopted by acclamation at the 20th plenary meeting of the 31st session.

Following the adoption of the Declaration, resolution 32C/34 was adopted during the 32nd session of the General Conference (October 2003) and further work on a legal instrument protecting and setting standards on cultural diversity had started. This legal document underlined the importance of measures taken by Member States to protect and promote cultural diversity.

The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions was adopted on 20 October 2005 at the 33rd session of the General Conference. In accordance with the Article 29, it has entered into force on 18 March 2007. Today, the Convention is ratified by 141 Member States and the European Union.

Key Provisions

The preamble of the Declaration firstly reaffirms the interplay between the “full implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms” and the respect and awareness for cultural diversity as stated by the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights. As recalled by the preamble of the Constitution of the UNESCO, “the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfill in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern”. The first Article of the same document underlines that the UNESCO has the competence to recommend international agreements that promote the “free flow of ideas by word and image”.

Therefore, the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity calls the Member States to respect the diversity of cultures within their territory, and to encourage dialogue and

cooperation “in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security”. The Declaration also encourages Member States to implement platform for intercultural dialogue, and acknowledges the challenges caused by “globalization, the rapid development of new information and communication technologies” in this regard.

Through Articles 1 to 11, the Declaration has set forward main principles to guide Member States in the implementation of measures promoting cultural diversity. The Article 12 states the role of UNESCO on the manner, and the Annex II of the proposes guidelines for an action plan that would allow Member States to implement the Declaration.

1. Identity, Diversity, and Pluralism

In Article 1, culture is defined as being part of “the identities of the groups and societies making up mankind”. Pluralism is defined in Article 2 as the “harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together”. Pluralism fosters the inclusion and participation of all citizens, “social cohesion, the vitality of civil society, and peace”.

Cultural diversity is then considered as important for “humankind as biodiversity is for nature”. It should be regarded as part of the common heritage for humanity and should benefit all present and future generations. Cultural diversity can also be described as a factor in development as it could serve as a way to achieve not only economic growth, but “a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence”.

2. Cultural Diversity and Human Rights

Cultural rights and diversity are an indivisible and integral part of the human rights and fundamental freedoms. As recalls in the Article 4, commitment to human rights implies a particular consideration for “the rights of persons belonging to minorities, and indigenous people”.

Human rights guaranteed by cultural diversity include the right to express and work in the language of an individual’s choice, the right to participate in the cultural life of his or her choice, and the right to a quality education and training in respect with his or her culture. The Declaration also mentions the right to equal access “for all cultures [...] to the means of expression and dissemination are the guarantees of cultural diversity”.

3. Cultural Diversity and Creativity

The Declaration recalls the link between creation and cultural traditions. Considered as the common cultural heritage, creativity should be encouraged in all its diversity, and should “inspire genuine dialogue among cultures”. Article 8 of the Declaration underlines the specificity of cultural goods and services, notably by recognizing the authors and artists. Article 9 calls all Member States to implement policies to ensure the protection of

cultural goods and services, and that those goods should not be treated as “mere commodities or consumer goods”.

4. Cultural Diversity and International Solidarity

Article 10 reminds the necessity “to reinforce international cooperation and solidarity” in order to counter the imbalances in the global flow of cultural goods and services, and to help all countries to have viable and competitive cultural industries. Article 11 states that in order to achieve this goal, building partnerships between the public sector, civil society, and private sector is one of the key to success.

Finally, Article 12 set forward some precisions on the role of the UNESCO in promoting and implementing the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. This article includes four main responsibilities for the UNESCO: promoting the “incorporation of principles set out in the Declaration”, “serve as a reference point and a forum” for States and non-states actors, “pursue its activities in standard-setting, awareness raising and capacity-building” in the fields of competence of the Declaration, and to facilitate its implementation.

The Annex II specifies guidelines for an action plan by the Member States to implement the Declaration. The Annex II states twenty objectives in order to help Member States to cooperate with each other, and fully commit to the Declaration. General objectives include developing a more specific definition of cultural diversity, its principles, standards and practices. The Annex also mentions the importance of clarifying “the content of cultural rights as an integral part of human rights”, and the “exchange of best practices and knowledge in regard to cultural pluralism”. Specific objectives of the action plan set in the Annex include “encouraging linguistic diversity”, “promoting education awareness”, working in partnerships with the private sector, and using the cyberspace as a tool to promote cultural diversity.

Canada’s Commitments and Responsibilities

Canada attended the 31st session of the General Conference where the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was adopted. Before the adoption of the Declaration, on the 13th plenary meeting (22 October 2001), Canada reiterated its support to the Declaration by underlining the importance of cooperation and dialogue among civilizations.

On 28 November 2005, Canada had accepted the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. There is no reservations that had been submitted by Canada up to this date.

Under its obligations as a state party to this Convention, Canada has the obligation to submit a periodic report to the Intergovernmental Committee stating the measures taken

to promote and protect cultural diversity on the national and international level. In its last report, published in 2012, Canada underlined some measures taken by the government to promote and protect cultural diversity, including implementation of cultural policies and measures, the signature of international bilateral cultural agreements, facilitating the participation of civil society, and hosting policy forums on sustainable development.

International Monitoring and Implementation

The Declaration provides general guidelines to be turned into policies by Member States in their specific contexts, in partnership with the private sector and civil society.

References

[Text of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity](#)

[Text of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#)

[Draft UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity](#)

[Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#)

[International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#)

[Report on the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression](#)

[Resolutions and reports of the General Conference, 31st Session of UNESCO](#)

[Canada's report for the implementation of the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#)

[Canada's First Report on the Implementation of the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#)

[Monitoring and Reporting for the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions](#)

[General introduction to the standard-setting instruments of UNESCO Declarations](#)

[UNESCO at a glance](#)