



## Press Release

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Office of the Ambassador/Permanent Delegate of St. Christopher (St. Kitts) and Nevis to UNESCO France

## St. Kitts and Nevis jumps into the core debates at the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Assembly in Paris



St. Kitts and Nevis actively participated at the UNESCO General Assembly of the States Parties to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, held in Paris over 4-6 June last, marking its first attendance at this biennial forum since the Federation ratified the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Convention in April 2016.

The Federation were represented by Dr David P. Doyle, Ambassador of St. Kitts and Nevis to UNESCO based in Paris and Ms. Marlene Phillips, Research and Documentation Specialist at the St. Kitts Department of Culture, and the Lead Intangible Cultural Heritage Focal Point (St. Kitts).

Ranking amongst the multiple heritage preservation conventions operated by UNESCO in Paris, the Intangible Cultural Heritage encompasses traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants, such

as oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe or the knowledge and skills to produce traditional crafts.

Since signing up to the ICH Convention, St. Kitts-Nevis' National Commission has launched a capacity-building project for the Federation, in cooperation with UNESCO, aimed at safeguarding of intangible heritage via the Intangible Heritage Fund. An ICH expert appointed by UNESCO is currently on the ground in the Federation to assist in this process and liaises with Ms. Marlene Phillips, and her counterpart in Nevis, Ms. Pauline Ngunjiri.

The ICH exercise in St. Kitts and Nevis is seen as the catalyst in contributing to the creation of an institutional and professional environment for safeguarding intangible cultural heritage by way of redesigning institutional infrastructures, revising cultural and other policies and legislation, developing inventory methods, devising effective safeguarding measures and participating in international cooperation mechanisms.

Several projects will ultimately be submitted to the UNESCO ICH programme for funding, to include, *inter alia*: Developing a framework for Inventorying the Living Heritage; strengthening the capacity within the masquerades and other indigenous dance and folklore groups and Launching of the National Cultural Policy.

The recent General Assembly of the IHC offered the St. Kitts and Nevis representatives the opportunity to contribute to strategic orientations for the implementation of the Convention and electing the 24 members of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

Part of the meeting was also dedicated to the international cooperation mechanisms established under the 2003 ICH Convention, such as inscriptions on the Lists and requests for International Assistance as well as the examination of national reports and the accreditation of NGOs.

On this occasion, the Federation representatives participated in the examination of some important items associated with the revision of the ICH Operational Directives, notably on the reporting requirements expected of State Parties like St. Kitts and Nevis.

Addressing over 100 sovereign states attending the ICH Assembly, Ambassador Doyle noted that *"St. Kitts and Nevis is at an early, embryonic stage in developing a national policy for Intangible Cultural Heritage, but like all small island developing states, has limited instructional capacity and expertise in complying with the sometimes onerous reporting requirements overseen by UNESCO"*. He urged the ICH Secretariat and experts to *"take account of the scale of small island states in*

*developing a more tailored reporting and compliance mechanism and provide the appropriate training to local ICH Focal Contact persons on the ground”.*

Tim Curtis, Secretary of the ICH Convention at UNESCO acknowledged in his reply that capacity-building funding and expertise was precisely earmarked for such activities.

On the fringes of the ICH Assembly, the St. Kitts and Nevis representatives met briefly with the newly-elected President of the Bureau of the ICH General Assembly, H.E. Vincenza Lomonaco, Ambassador of Italy (see photo).

In a statement at the conclusion of the ICH Assembly in Paris, Ms. Marlene Phillips, St. Kitts lead on ICH activities within the Department of Culture, stated:

*"It was a privilege to meet Her Excellency Ms. Vincenza Lomonaco, Ambassador of Italy, and congratulate her as the new Chairperson elected to Bureau of the General Assembly of State Parties to the Convention for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH).*

*Representing St. Kitts and Nevis in the ICH General Assembly UNESCO Paris over the past few days has been a great honour, and meeting other state parties to the ICH Convention that share similar ideas, goals, and challenges, has reinforced my commitment to initiate activities that will help to build the capacity of Kittitians, and Nevisians to improve their understanding of the ICH Convention in order to identify their valued ICH, develop safeguarding mechanisms to protect it, and create educational programs to transfer their ICH to the next generation, as a means of preservation".*