

St. Kitts and Nevis seeks to scale up its UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage credentials



L/R SKN focal contact, Marlene Phillips, ICH President Ambassador Vincenza Lomonaco, and Ambassador David Doyle

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December 23, 2021 (St. Kitts and Nevis National Commission for UNESCO) – Just before the Christmas recess, St. Kitts and Nevis addressed the sixteenth session of the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage on progress being made to implement an ICH policy framework across the Federation.

The Committee, holding its session virtually over 13 - 18 December 2021, was chaired by Mr. Punchi Nilame Meegaswatte, Secretary-General - Sri Lanka National Commission for UNESCO, brought together hundreds of participants – representatives of States Parties, non-governmental organizations, cultural institutions and other stakeholders – from across the globe, to recognise new Intangible Cultural Heritage items for listing on the UNESCO ICH register and hear of progress from State Parties currently implementing ICH policies at the national level.

The Federation's Ambassador and Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Dr. David Doyle, had the privilege to brief the ICH Committee on the "remarkable progress" made in the past two years in delivering on the ground the UNESCO ICH project entitled: Strengthening Inventory Preparation Capacity for Implementing the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in St. Kitts and Nevis, backed by nearly \$100,000 funds from UNESCO. This arose from a request by the St. Kitts and Nevis Ministry of Culture in 2018 for technical and financial assistance from the UNESCO Intangible Heritage Fund to build national safeguarding capacity.

Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, restricting mobility across the twin-island state, the St. Kitts and Nevis ICH focal contacts - Marlene Phillips and Patrick Howell, supported by the St. Kitts & Nevis National Commission for UNESCO led by Ms Dorothy Warner - completed the ICH project on time and within the budget earlier this year. Central to the focal contacts' efforts was the main objective aimed at implementing a Pilot Inventorying Exercise to identify ICH Elements in need of safeguarding in St. Kitts and Nevis, and document them.

Amongst the ICH items identified, reported Ambassador Doyle to the ICH Committee, were Clay Pottery, Cactus Prickly Pear (the uses) and Vernacular Architecture at Butler's Community Centre, Calabash utensils, Cassava bread, Kittitian house broom and tradition-bearer story-telling.

Ambassador Doyle also reported that the UNESCO ICH fund served to organise ICH awareness-raising workshops for implementing the convention at the national level, sensitizing approximately 65 (40 St. Kitts and 25 Nevis) diverse stakeholders including tradition bearers, members of the community, government officials, researchers, librarians, documentalists, youths, and elders, in both male and female gender from 9 Parishes in St. Kitts and 5 Parishes in Nevis.

This was augmented by providing ICH training in research and inventorying skills that were provided for 50 persons (30 St Kitts, 20 Nevis).

The Federation's envoy to UNESCO underlined the gratitude conveyed by the Hon. Jonel Powell, Minister for Education, Culture, Youth Engagement and Sports, who also oversees the UNESCO portfolio, for the formidable level of uninterrupted support and guidance provided by the UNESCO ICH experts in Paris in the implementation of the St. Kitts and Nevis' national ICH project.

The Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, to which the Federation is a signatory since April 2016, sets out to identify traditions included in an ICH List compiled by UNESCO embracing a compendium of customs, ceremonies, and traditions from around the globe.

The ICH List currently consists of some 530 items from 136 countries.

Starting from early 2022, St. Kitts and Nevis will pursue the second phase of the national ICH policy framework and intends to apply for fresh UNESCO funding to benefit from technical assistance to elaborate a request for international assistance from the Intangible Cultural Heritage Fund of the 2003 Convention (US\$99,000), to create a National ICH Policy for tradition bearers, and safeguarding ICH Elements.

UNESCO will deploy a leading ICH expert, Nigel Encalada, to assist the Federal ICH focal contacts in drafting an SKN request for international assistance. If all goes according to plan, the SKN National Commission will submit ICH project in time for the ICH Committee to review its contents in March 2022.

Commenting on the progress and next steps, Minister Powell observed: "The St. Kitts and Nevis Intangible Cultural Heritage activity has been a resounding success on the ground and I look forward to reviewing in 2023 the proposals for a national ICH policy framework".