

St. Kitts and Nevis receives UNESCO's funding to pioneer its Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) Policy ambitions



L-R: Director of Culture, Troy Mills; Acting ICH secretariat Manager (St. Kitts), Jequan Harvey; SKN Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, Ambassador David Doyle; Research and Documentation Specialist, Marlene Phillips

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23rd June 2022 -- Earlier this morning at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, the Bureau of the Committee for Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) approved an ICH project proposed by the Ministry of Culture of St. Kitts and Nevis to promote the government's mandate of developing a structured national ICH policy framework.

St. Kitts and Nevis is now poised to receive over US\$ 90,000 to implement the ICH project in both St. Kitts and in Nevis over the next two years, under the Ministries of Culture, spearheaded by the Focal Contacts, Marlene Phillips (St. Kitts) and Patrick Howell (Nevis).

The route to this compelling outcome has been long, but productive and rewarding. In April of this year, with the expertise provided by UNESCO-accredited ICH expert consultant, Nigel Encalada, and in collaboration with the St. Kitts & Nevis National Commission for UNESCO, the application for the project entitled: **'Safeguarding St. Kitts and Nevis Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) – Developing a National Intangible Cultural Heritage Policy'** was submitted. This was designed to create not only a **National ICH Policy** Framework to safeguard the knowledge of tradition bearers, but also to identify and preserve individual ICH elements.

This newly approved project comes directly 'on the heels' of a previous UNESCO-funded ICH project completed late last year in delivering on the ground the ICH project: **'Strengthening Inventory Preparation Capacity for Implementing the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in St. Kitts and Nevis'**, which was also backed by nearly US\$100,000.

Over the past three years, the ICH Focal Contacts pioneered an inventorying exercise in St. Kitts and Nevis, identifying ICH elements in need of safeguarding and documenting them. Amongst the ICH items identified were: Clay Pottery, Cactus Prickly Pear (the uses), Vernacular Architecture, Calabash utensils, Cassava bread, a Kittitian house-broom and tradition-bearers' storytelling.

The ICH funding approved today in Paris will build on the work done in the first phase. In developing the National ICH policy framework for submission to the government, several ICH awareness-raising workshops will be hosted for implementing the convention at the national level. These will cater to a diverse stakeholder community of tradition bearers, members of the cultural community, government officials, researchers, librarians, documentalists, youth and elders (both male and female) across St. Kitts and Nevis.

The Federation's Permanent Delegate to UNESCO in Paris, Ambassador Dr. David Doyle, who attended the ICH Bureau session, stated enthusiastically, "This technical assistance and funding will massively scale-up St. Kitts and Nevis' capacity and expertise in developing an indigenous Intangible Cultural Heritage Policy Framework for the government, citizens and everyone associated with preserving the cultural heritage in the twin-island Federation."

Secretary-General to the St. Kitts & Nevis National Commission for UNESCO, Ms. Dorothy Warner remarked, "The St. Kitts and Nevis Intangible Cultural Heritage activities have reaped this resounding success. The key players in the Federation are to be congratulated for their sterling work in developing a compelling second-phase project proposal worthy of UNESCO's endorsement."

Commenting on the approval of the project, Ms. Marlene Phillips, Research and Documentation Specialist at the Department of Culture and Focal Point (St. Kitts), said,

"The ICH Secretariat St. Kitts and Nevis Living Heritage expresses its gratitude to UNESCO ICH Fund for supporting our initiative to develop a National ICH Policy. We are very excited to lay the foundation for safeguarding cultural traditions that are maintained by tradition bears and valued by members of the community. The ICH Policy Framework should ensure that cultural practices are transferred to future generations through education, and the rights, skills and years of experience of tradition bearers are respected."

The Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003 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 at some 530 items from 136 countries.