OCTOBER 16TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION - UKCCD + EUNIC

Cyprus High Commission

Keynote - UNESCO's Convention 2005: A Toolkit for our Cultural Rights.

Holly Aylett

This celebratory event is taking place in a momentous week full of hope, relief, fear and ongoing menace, for all of us. It is strangely prescient because the institution of UNESCO is inspired by the recognition that wars begin in the minds of men. The exact quote from its constitution reads, "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed". This founding statement expresses the same post-war aspiration for global healing as the UN in its entirety but UNESCO specifically addresses the role of education, science and culture. Today more than ever we need to find new ways, decolonise our minds and move forward, and the Convention we are here to celebrate offers one unique toolkit of actions.

UNESCO has a series of conventions relating to culture: the best known is the World Heritage Convention,1972, less well-known the Intangible Heritage Convention, 2003, and in the UK, virtually unknown, a well-kept secret, the Convention on Diversity of Cultural Expressions 2005. This treaty aims to defend and promote the world's diversity of languages, in the broadest sense, and to affirm participation, pluralism and freedom by placing our cultures at the centre the global conversation**.**

It has taken twenty years to build consensus around its operating guidelines and to start putting this Convention into practice. These have been years of apocalyptic violence in the aftermath of 9/11: the war on terror, the break-up of Iraq, the destruction of Libya and Syria, through to the last two year's tragic slaughter of the innocents. This makes it all the more urgent to prioritise the aims of this Convention**,** to displace 'the politics of fear', propaganda about the 'enemy within', and the need to 'other' our fellow citizens. Instead we need to build on what we share and renew the planet, the only home we have, whose bio-diversity, now damaged, lies in all our stewardship

This is the conviction which has motivated and continues to motivate the people we work with through the International Federation of Coalitions who in the

different regions of the world bring together civil society to implement the aims of this Convention. Carole Tongue and I are founder members and we then went on to start the UK coalition, UKCCD, in 2007, when the UK ratified the Convention.

'Diversity of cultural expressions' should not be confused with the term 'cultural diversity' as recognised in the UK. It includes these agendas, but it involves a far broader concept of intra-national exchange and dialogue. It also recognises culture, both our creative expressions and our cultural rights, as the missing 4th pillar in strategies for global development, alongside the three which we all know about and on which governments traditionally build – the economic, the social and the environmental. In this sense this Convention has been recognised as a Magna Carta for culture.

The Convention is built on several core principles. Firstly, that cultural goods and services have a dual nature**:** they are both economic and cultural, because they carry identity, values, and meaning. They are not commodities like cars or pharmaceuticals, neither do they perform according to the same economic rules of production and exchange. This recognition then allows for a cultural exception to the norms governing the globalisation of trade. In particular it recognises the sovereign right of states ***"****to maintain, adopt, and implement policies to protect and promote the diversity of cultural expressions on their territory"*.

In practice, this can be translated into measures to defend and expand our creator base, and creators' rights to fair remuneration, something being vigorously contested today by the controlling stakeholders of the digital/AI environment both in the UK and in Europe, not least by the current American administration. Ultimately our resistance is a defence of our values.

In relation to GenAI, for instance, why should copyright law not apply to creators works instead of being extracted, for free, by huge, immensely profitable tech corporations? Does it matter that 20% of tracks on Spotify are now AI-generated, imitating real artists material – tracks that are "like" Kate Bush, Paul McCartney, Ed Sheran or Elton John - while Spotify offers no fair compensation? Currently, the return to the artist successful enough to reach one million downloads is a mere £325, the equivalent of selling about 17 vinyls. How can any artist survive on this?

Turning to the audiovisual sector, do we want to allow a situation where only 17% of total investment goes into our local High End producers, or that less than 7% of what see on our cinema screens is local British independent production. And what about our children and the audiovisual culture they grow up in? Local production, based on our own stories, has almost collapsed allowing the allure of american-dominated narratives, many in animation, to frame the image of our children's worlds.

These are questions for all of us as well as for our government and policy makers. What are the values we want our national policy to stand for in the UK? We have cultural rights and this Convention recognises our government's need to defend them.

The second core principle is "preferential treatment", All signatories commit to restoring greater equality to North-South exchange of culture, and developed countries commit to taking measures to facilitate the flow of cultural goods and services from developing countries. This has been one of the hardest principles to implement in practice though there is now a growing focus on it given the statistics. Trade in cultural goods is a key economic driver but participation of developing countries in the flow of cultural goods has stagnated over the last three years so that trade from the least developed countries now accounts for less than 0.5% of the global cultural goods trade. Meanwhile artists, musicians in particular, continue to face enormous obstacles just to travel within their own continents let alone participating internationally.

Finally, this is the only Convention with an article committing governments to work with civil society. We have a voice in the assemblies governing the Convention, we hold a bi-annual civil society forum, we deliver reports on our actions to the Secretariat and we are consulted. Civil society is an amorphous, uncontainable beast, but the International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity, IFCCD, has played the leading role in representing this sector from the beginning, and because many of us are cultural practitioners or work for institutions advocating for culture and our creators, our expertise has been critical. Speaking as a filmmaker it is rare to find a civil servant or politician who 'gets it', understands the complexity of the business models that creators' lives depend on. This is critical as we take up the challenge of evolving policy together to regulate the complex impact of digital and AI technologies. Recently, the IFCCD played a key role, hosting a UNESCO panel of experts to

identify key principles to sustain diversity of expressions in an AI environment and advising on the digital protocol which is to be added to the Convention.

One of the most important initiatives which the International Federation and other civil society organisations have been working on in the past years concerns the outline for a stand-alone goal for culture. This would make Culture the 18th goal when in 2030, the Sustainable Development Goals will be renewed. For culture to become the 4th pillar in development this is essential.

It's often argued that culture is implicit in all the existing goals so doesn't need to have its own goal or targets. The evidence does not sustain this. Even in a developed country, like the UK**,** and taking education as an example, successive administrations have favoured so-called STEM subjects – science, technology, engineering and medicine, to the detriment of humanities, not just in the higher education sector, but also in our schools. Currently grades in arts subjects are not even taken into account in assessing school results.

Although culture is now included as one of the eight industries in this Government's Industrial Strategy, it continues to be considered the poor relative even though the contribution of our creative industries to our GDP is second only to the financial sector and in terms of employment it outperforms all other sectors. In the Campaign for the Arts' recent report, The State of the Arts, published last year with Warwick University, the figures show how funding for the arts has collapsed. Some local council's have been forced to drop the entirety of their cultural budgets in favour of other social and economic imperatives, and one of the major foundations, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, who might have stepped in, has recently suspended their grants for the arts programme due to 'unprecedented demand'.

Looking at examples of the Sustainable Development Goals at a global level only a third of countries with cultural policies include gender- specific policies for women, and the cultural rights of indigenous peoples, whose communities are stewards of 25% of the world's surface and who represent the majority of the world's languages, continue to be marginalised. This is increasingly the case in an on-line world mediated by only a handful of dominant languages and their written source materials.

Those who oppose a stand-alone goal have long argued that culture is not 'goalable'. This is no longer tenable. IFCCD has been working as part of Culture2030, a group including other international organisations such as The International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies, IFACCA, The International Council on Monuments and Sites, ICOMOS, Arterial Network and others. Following an extensive international survey, we have drafted a goal with eight targets and outlined the possible indicators. This can now be used as a basic structure by governments and refined in time for the staged negotiations before the next SDGs come into place.

However, the challenge now is to focus the political will to make this a reality. By far the majority of nations is now behind it. This is evidenced in the declaration of the recent Mondiacult2025, the largest assembly of culture ministers, non-government organisations, cultural organisations and civil society focusing on our cultural needs and challenges and held this time in Barcelona. It is regrettable that the UK government aligned with a minority of others, significantly located in the global North, to continue to resist the possibility of a stand-alone goal.

International conventions offer us all potential frameworks for the future, directions of travel. Just like the Human Rights Convention, in the years ahead, UNESCO's Convention 2005 will be as effective and as useful as our will to use and promote it**.** Our creators have a critical role to play in this, and in particular in humanising the AI environment which we are ushering in and whose impact is likely to dominate the next decade. Defending our cultural rights will matter hugely and for all of us, creators, audiences, citizens and indigenous peoples. UNESCO's Convention 2005 offers us one toolkit to safeguard, define and promote these rights.