



UK Coalition for Cultural Diversity

BACKGROUND: THE UNESCO CONVENTION ON THE DIVERSITY OF CULTURAL EXPRESSIONS, 2005

UNESCO's 2005 Convention signals international recognition that culture should be the 4th pillar of development, alongside economic prosperity, social inclusion and environmental balance. Now celebrating its 10th year, it has been signed by 139 countries and has implications at international, regional, and national level. It provides a unique international instrument to keep open a pluralist space for creative works recognising that local arts - including books, film, music, dance, the performing arts, television and the visual arts – play a central role in building intercultural dialogue, identity, tolerance, and critical understanding in today's societies.

While other UNESCO treaties deal with culture more generally – heritage, intangible and marine heritage etc. - this one specifically addresses creative and artistic works, particularly those transformed by the digital technologies. It is the only international treaty to recognise that these works have both a cultural and an economic value and that they are important vectors of identity and meaning. It therefore safeguards the sovereignty of states to develop national policy in the interests of sustaining national culture. Significantly, it also makes it a Right & Obligation for all signatories to promote greater cultural cooperation and north-south, south-south exchange in support of the developing world.

The Convention was adopted by UNESCO's 33rd General Conference. It grew out of increasing concern during the 1990s, from creator organisations, ministers of culture and parliamentarians, that diversity of cultural expressions was being threatened by the globalisation of trade and services, not least through the WTO, and the internationalisation of the policy process in fields as diverse as finance, the environment, human rights, health and culture. Today, although the WTO process has stalled, bi-lateral trade agreements between nation states, or between regions continue apace, for instance the current free trade agreement under discussion between Europe and the United States, the Transatlantic Trade & Investment Partnership, TTIP, where cultural assets and freedoms are at stake. In these situations the Convention offers a normative framework to safeguard national policies in support of local expressions. In the audiovisual sector, for example, this might be through continued support for public service broadcasting, quotas and/or production and distribution subsidies, and in the context of the TTIP the Convention has been cited in defense of a “cultural exception” which would remove all cultural services from the negotiations. Equally importantly, the articles make provision for governments to consider any trade agreements with other countries in terms of their potential impact on diversity of cultural expressions.

As a legal instrument the Convention has parity with other international treaties and should therefore be taken into consideration by other directives such as those of the World Trade Organisation governing the economy, or the directives of the Kyoto Treaty governing the environment. Its operational guidelines have been put in place by its executive body, an Intergovernmental Committee with 24 representatives, which meets once a year, served by its secretariat at UNESCO's Head Office in Paris. Operational guidelines can be found on UNESCO's site, <http://en.unesco.org/creativity/>

Exceptionally, Article 11 of the Convention calls for affirmative action to involve civil society in its implementation and civil society organizations are formally invited to observe and feedback. In September 2007 grassroots coalitions of creator organisations set up The International Federation of Coalitions, (IFCCD), to motivate the implementation of the Conventions' aims, to feed back to the Intergovernmental Committee, and to act as a consultative partner with unique expertise in the cultural sectors of civil society, <http://www.ficdc.org/?lang=en>
The UK Coalition for Cultural Diversity is a founding member and regularly contributes to these representations, <https://ukccd.wordpress.com>

The Convention became law in the UK in March 2008. As a member of the European Community, the UK government is also party to the directives and initiatives being actively pursued to implement the Convention, where it has had a significant impact on the frameworks for trade negotiations and led to the inclusion of cultural protocols. It has also strengthened awareness of the role of culture in development agendas, particularly informing current discussions for the post-Millennium Development Goals. It has also been included in the priorities for action by the UK National Commission for UNESCO and The Commonwealth Foundation has actively supported ratification by all Commonwealth States.

The UKCCD continues to play the leading role for civil society in this country. Working with a range of partners, it has run a series of cross-sectoral conferences to promote awareness of the Convention, and to mobilize stakeholders to implement its objectives. It also monitors legislative developments and their impact on arts and the cultural sector both in the UK and in Europe where we engage with the European Union and the Council of Europe together with our European partner coalitions based in Brussels.