



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization



World  
Heritage  
Convention

# Somalia Develops a National Strategy for Culture

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A somali woman building a house © Mouseawale88

UNESCO joined forces with the Somalia Academy of Science and Arts (SOMASA) in collaboration with the Somali National Commission for UNESCO and the Somali

Permanent Delegation to UNESCO to organize a national consultation meeting on 23 and 24 November 2020 with national and international experts and other key stakeholders in the culture sector in Somalia to develop a National Strategic Plan for the safeguarding and promotion of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in Somalia.

The hybrid meeting, which included the physical participation of over 20 national stakeholders at SOMASA and online participation by a dozen UNESCO representatives and international experts, follows the ratification by the Government of Somalia of the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972) and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003), which entered into force for Somalia on 23 October 2020.

"It is indeed inspiring to see so many efforts being deployed by the government and the citizens of Somalia to harness the potential of culture for sustainable development, peacebuilding and resilience. As the world shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, we had rays of light shining from Somalia as news spread around the globe of the reopening of the National Museum, the reopening of the National Theatre, and the reopening of the National Library—all after almost 30 years of closure due to ongoing conflict. This revived cultural compound will surely be the beating heart of Somalia's culture sector. Through these institutions, Somalia can offer its citizens and visitors alike opportunities for lifelong learning and enjoyment, and UNESCO stands ready to accompany you in this endeavor." Mr. Ernesto Ottone, UNESCO Assistant Director-General for Culture.

In his opening remarks, H.E. Abdirahman Mohamud Abdule, State Minister, Somali Ministry of Education, Culture and Higher Education, stressed the importance of culture for peacebuilding in Somalia. He praised Mr. Abdiqani Ahmed Abdullahi from the Somali Permanent Delegation to UNESCO and thanked Ms. Sagal Mahamed Ali, Advisor to

the Minister, for their leading roles in reviving the culture sector in Somalia. "We are proud of our culture and our heritage," he said. "As we develop our National Strategy for Culture, we will draw on the rich experiences and expertise of the national and international experts gathered here today, and we will make women and youth priorities and pillars for its implementation," he added.

Following the opening remarks, a keynote address was made by Prof. Mohamed Osman Bulbul, who set the tone for the two-day meeting with his insights and recollections of the culture sector in Somalia. He recalled rich handicraft and textile traditions that have been so integral to the Somali national identity and reiterated the strong oral traditions for the transmission of cultural heritage through poetry, song and dance that are still vibrant today. Highlighting the leading role played by women in transmission of culture in Somalia, he called on participants to include them in the forefront of development efforts. He recognized the strong economic potential of culture and encouraged youth to be the main beneficiaries of job creation related to the cultural and creative economy.

Ms. Maria Zakaria Ahmed, Gender Specialist from the Banadir Regional Administration, raised awareness of the Role of Women and Youth in Somali culture, and the Chairperson of SOMASA, Mr. Abdulkadir Nur Hussein, delivered a passionate overview of the Culture Sector, going back in history to cite its peaks and progress and looking forward to identify opportunities and challenges. Mr. Jama Igal, National Peace building Coordinator made a riveting presentation on Somalia Cultural heritage and its potential for peace and reconciliation using the metaphor of the "haan" milk container, which illustrated the interdependency of Somali efforts and social cohesion through collaboration for peacebuilding and development. Prof. Dr. Osman Gedow Amir shared his knowledge of the natural heritage in Somalia and stressed the need for national policies, which do not yet exist in Somalia for natural and cultural heritage management. "It's never too late to pick up the pieces for Somalia," he said. Prof. Mohamed Abdulkadir Ahmed shared his expertise in cities, urban and built heritage, and highlighted potential coastal cities for inclusion on UNESCO's World Heritage List with a presentation on the ancient coastal cities and the Bravanese and Benadiri communities.

The second day of the meeting was opened by Ms. Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta, Director of the UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa, who

stressed the need for both inter-ministerial and international cooperation in development of the culture sector, and encouraged a participatory approach in the elaboration of the Strategy and Action Plan to ensure relevance, ownership and sustainability.

"Let us use this opportunity to see how culture in Somalia can be a vector for social change, peacebuilding and resilience; how it can contribute to fighting climate change; to promoting gender equality; to empowering youth; to ensuring lifelong learning and enjoyment by all!" Ms. Ann Therese Ndong-Jatta, Director of the UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa.

UNESCO mobilized international experts in various fields of competence to offer guidance, best practices and examples from Africa and around the globe in the development of Somalia's National Strategy for Culture. Ms. Ayeta Wangusa, the lead UNESCO expert for this activity, gave an introduction to culture policies and the potential of the cultural and creative industries sector for sustainable economic development. Ms. Emily Drani, Executive Director of the Cross-Cultural Foundation of Uganda shared insights on safeguarding intangible cultural heritage. Prof. George Abungu led discussions on both cultural heritage and museums. Lastly, Dr. Peter Howard provided an overview of the need for identification, management and conservation of natural heritage, the process for developing a World Heritage nomination file, and possible natural heritage of "outstanding universal value" in Somalia.

Mr. Ahmed Yussuf, Secretary General of Somali National Commission for UNESCO, pronounced the closing remarks on both days. He stressed the commitment and readiness of Somalia to move forward in the development of its culture sector. He noted that many institutions in Somalia are focused on protecting culture and suggested they broaden their definitions of culture to include its multiple forms from tangible and intangible to underwater cultural heritage to natural heritage and the cultural and creative industries. He expressed optimism that this Culture Strategy will help focus priorities and efforts towards development of the culture sector in Somalia.

Following this meeting, the national and international experts will work together on drafting the National Strategy for Culture and its Action Plan, which will be reviewed during a validation meeting in January 2021 with a wide range of stakeholders, including youth.

### States Parties (1)

- [Somalia](#)

### Regions (1)

- [Africa](#)

### Other news (3)

- [Somalia Develops a National Strategy for Culture 27-Nov-2020](#)
- [Somalia seeks to strengthen management of its newly rehabilitated National Museum 27-Nov-2020](#)
- [Historic visit by Director-General of UNESCO to Somalia to support human dimension of reconstruction through education and culture 11-Feb-2020](#)

### See Also (1)

- [Africa](#)

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