

**STATEMENT DELIVERED ON BEHALF OF THE COUNTRIES LISTED BELOW UNDER AGENDA ITEM 5 DURING THE 18th session of the Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

I am giving this statement on behalf of Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine.

Despite repeated appeals to cease Russia's illegal, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of aggression against Ukraine, the war continues to affect all areas of life in Ukraine. In addition to the devastating loss of human life, material and environmental damages and the destruction of cultural heritage, it also negatively impacts the social fabric of Ukrainian society, tearing families apart and forcing millions of people to flee their homes. As a result, the living heritage of communities in Ukraine, a fundamental part of the identity, resilience, and continuity, is under threat.

The fifth principle of the Ethical Principles for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage stipulates that „access of communities, groups and individuals to the instruments, objects, artefacts, cultural and natural spaces and places of memory whose existence is necessary for expressing the intangible cultural heritage should be ensured, including in situations of armed conflict“. But communities in Ukraine are struggling with this unexpected and unacceptable situation, facing denial of Ukrainian culture and threats to the transmission and viability of their intangible cultural heritage. Impact of this war of aggression on their cultural rights and fundamental freedoms is obvious.

We therefore appreciate the UNESCO leadership in providing emergency assistance for Ukraine to cope with the adverse impact of the Russian aggression. It has been instrumental in ensuring education, and in protecting cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible. Several coordination meetings organized by the Secretariat in this context led, among others, to the development of (a) a project, supported by UNESCO's Heritage Emergency Fund, aimed at integrating living heritage in education, (b) two International Assistance requests approved by the Bureau of the Convention in 2023 to address the safeguarding needs of Ukrainian populations temporarily displaced in Romania and Slovakia, and (c) a joint initiative by UNESCO and the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine for the development of the Action Plan for the Protection of Culture in Ukraine.

We commend specifically this Committee for its contribution to safeguarding Ukrainian intangible heritage by inscribing “the culture of Ukrainian borscht cooking” on the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

We also highly acknowledge five neighbouring countries, HU, MD, PL, RO and SK, for their engagement in the framework of the project initiated by UNESCO's Secretariat for the 2003 Convention in April 2022, aiming at identification of living heritage safeguarding among displaced communities from Ukraine, and in implementing follow up projects resulting from this exercise.

Finally, we reiterate our demand on the Russian Federation to end its war of aggression against Ukraine, and to immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its troops and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders and to cease its destruction of tangible and intangible Ukrainian cultural Heritage.