

## ICH NGO Forum Statement

**Intangible cultural heritage (ICH)** is safeguarded by communities, groups, and individuals who exercise ongoing stewardship over their living heritage, fostering and supporting sustainable development, human rights, well-being, societal resilience, identity, creativity, and peaceful, inclusive societies.

As the ICH NGO Forum of accredited NGOs accredited to the intergovernmental Committee of UNESCO's 2003 Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, we wish to underline that ICH -living heritage – is central to understanding culture as a global public good. As all aspects of sustainable development have an essential cultural dimension, and culture as a whole, needs to be integrated into cross-cutting development frameworks, the ICH NGO Forum also stresses the need for a stand-alone culture goal within the Sustainable Development agenda beyond 2030.

Furthermore, we underline that, communities must always remain at the centre of all safeguarding efforts and future cultural policies. Diverse civil society organisations and NGOs play a crucial role in supporting community-led initiatives, facilitating participation, and advocating for inclusive governance, ethical use of digital technologies and AI, and recognition of diverse forms of knowledge, including informal and non-formal expertise.

As the ICH NGO Forum – and in line with the principles of cultural diversity and equitable geographical representation – we wish to call upon all stakeholders present at the Barcelona conference to recognise that living heritage and its related international instruments, in particular UNESCO's 2003 Convention, must be given due consideration in guiding actions across multiple policy areas with an emphasis on:

Cultural Rights: by co-protecting and promoting cultural identity, dignity, and the rights of all groups, especially marginalised, non-dominant, and Indigenous communities.

- **Digital Technologies & AI:** by ensuring equitable, ethical, and community-controlled use of digital tools and their heritage data, and preventing new forms of digital colonialism and marginalisation.
- **Education:** by supporting intergenerational transmission, creativity, informal and non-formal education, and social inclusion, ultimately ensuring quality education that truly develops children's capacities.
- **Economy of Culture:** by supporting diverse, context-sensitive, sustainable livelihoods for ICH bearers while protecting culture from misappropriation and commodification and promoting community-led governance in creative sectors.
- **Climate Action:** by leveraging traditional ecological knowledge and sustainable practices to adapt better to and mitigate environmental impacts while enhancing community resilience.
- **Peace:** by employing the potentials of living heritage to foster mutual respect and dialogue, social cohesion, tolerance, and reconciliation and contributing to peaceful, just, and inclusive societies.

The ICH NGO Forum calls on States Parties and other stakeholders to ensure that, policies, resources, and international cooperation recognise and support ICH communities, practitioners, and NGOs as essential partners in safeguarding living heritage for present and future generations. We reaffirm that living heritage is an indispensable part of culture, understood as a global public good.

In Barcelona, 30 September 2025

ICH NGO Forum Executive Board