Opening Address
By Ms Françoise Rivière
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On the occasion of the

First Session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions

Ottawa, Canada
Government Conference Centre

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Ottawa and in Quebec where the meeting of the World Heritage Committee will take place.

My thanks also go to all the Parties

Community as a Regional Economic Integration Organization. Let me remind you that six months ago, at the First Conference of the Parties, there were only 57. Such speed is unprecedented for standard-setting instruments in the field of culture.

I am delighted to note that the Asia-Pacific region now counts seven Parties (Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Mongolia, New Zealand and Viet Nam) and that five Arab States (Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman and Tunisia) have ratified the Convention. The imbalance in the geographical distribution that was of such much concern to us in June is in currently being corrected.

The pace of ratifications is far from slowing down. In fact, some fifteen Member States representing all UNESCO electoral groups have announced that they have begun and, in some cases, completed their internal ratification process. I am happy to announce that the United Kingdom has deposited its ratification instrument on 7 December.

This result reflects the efforts of the entire international community, and more specifically the Organisation internationale de la francophonie and its Secretary-General, Mr Abdou Diouf, the International Network on Cultural Policy as well as different civil society coalitions.

If the movement is underway, we must continue to lend it our support. The legitimacy of any instrument is indeed linked to the number of ratifications representing all regions of the world. Moreover, international solidarity, which is a major aspect of this Convention, cannot be meaningful without a balanced geographic representation of the Parties.

The rapid ratification of the text is obviously a clear signal from the international community. The quality of your work will be another.

I shall not dwell on the First Session of the Conference of Parties or on its success as demonstrated by the high number of participants – over 400 – and the consensual atmosphere that prevailed. I would simply like to thank its Chairperson, Professor Asmal. Without him, we would not be here today, at this crossroads, on the eve of formulating the operational guidelines of this new instrument.

At its First Session, the Conference adopted two resolutions which will guide your work until its next session in June 2009. The first is the resolution whereby the Conference requires the Committee to submit proposals concerning the development of operational guidelines, giving priority attention to the provisions of Articles 7, 8 and 11 to 17 of the Convention. The second is the resolution regarding Article 18. These articles concern measures that should be taken for the promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions, international cooperation, the role of civil

sector and not-for-profit organizations; Article 16 concerns preferential treatment for developing countries. This document calls on the Committee to conduct an initial exchange of ideas. In light of your discussions, draft texts concerning these articles will be prepared for review and discussion at your next meeting, which the Director-General proposes to hold from 24 to 27 June 2008 at UNESCO Headquarters.

The **third** document is devoted to civil society. It is complemented by an information document, which provides definitions and explains the functions and roles of civil society. In fact, one of the paradoxes of this Convention is that it addresses the States but requires a very active involvement of civil society for its implementation. How can we define civil society, particularly in the field of culture, when we do not yet have an accurate mapping of what it is? How can we organize its contribution to the actions implemented by States? These are some of the issues which should be directly addressed.

Finally, and this will be the subject of the **fourth** document, you will have to consider the issue of the International Fund for Cultural Diversity. As you know, this Fund is intended for Parties from developing countries to strengthen their cultural industries. Its resources comprise voluntary contributions from the Parties. A contribution has already been made by Andorra, another has been pledged (Belgium – the French Community

and the Walloon region) and several others were promised during the Conference of Parties (Brazil,

the emergence of an enabling environment for cultural industries through partnerships that enable an exchange of knowledge and best practices, with respect for the equal dignity of cultures, which is a governing principle of the Convention.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me, finally, to stress once again the ambitious scope of the Convention and to encourage you to be inspired by the text while bearing in mind its purpose. The Preamble states that “cultural activities, goods and services have both an economic and a cultural nature, because they convey identities, values and meanings, and must therefore not be treated as solely having commercial value”. International cooperation – a fundamental instrument to promote the emergence of cultural industries and the circulation of goods and services in developing countries – must contribute to poverty eradication. Furthermore, to ensure that development is sustainable, we must succeed in integrating culture into development policies. This is the ultimate goal of the Convention: to strengthen measures and cultural policies, and encourage public debate to devise strategies that enable culture to be integrated into development policies.

By means of periodic reports, the Convention will also allow us to measure diversity, assess its weaknesses and its progress, and follow the contours and dynamics of social change within the Parties, thus revealing cultural diversity within the territories of State Parties. The objective we must pursue is to promote interactions among groups that

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Bringing this Convention to life is a great and difficult mission for the Parties and for UNESCO. I have no doubts that this first meeting of the Committee will live up to the high expectations anticipated by all.

Thank you.