

Remarks for
The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur
Minister of Culture

**UNESCO Convention on the Protection and
Promotion of the Diversity of
Cultural Expression:
Why it Matters to Ontario**

Schulich School of Business, York University
Toronto, Ontario

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- Thank you, Scott (*Scott McIntyre, Co-Chair, Canada's Coalition for Cultural Diversity*), for that introduction.
- And, thank you for organizing today's symposium on the UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expression.
- It is a pleasure to see so many members of Canada's Coalition for Cultural Diversity.
- I know the coalition has been working very hard to make sure the convention is ratified by as many countries as possible.
- I commend you on your work.

- It is an honour to speak to so many distinguished guests from around the world; as well as Canada's Ambassador to UNESCO, Yvon Charbonneau.
- Today, I want you to understand why it is the UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expression matters so much to me and to Ontario.
- There are three things I want to tell you.
- 1. First, I would like to share some of the accomplishments of Ontario's cultural sector, as well as the challenges we are facing.

- 2. Second, I will talk about the key points of the convention, and why they are crucial to Ontario's cultural development.
- Third, I will talk to you about what we are doing in Ontario to support the convention.
- Let me begin by saying that Ontario endorses the right of all governments to support artistic endeavour and cultural expression.
- This support for culture must be realized through a full range of policy options.
- Our cultural communities help us exchange ideas, images, stories and experiences that are uniquely Canadian.

- Ontario's arts and cultural sector spurs the growth of our Province's creative economy.
- It strengthens our competitive advantage and promotes innovation and discovery.
- Our quality of life is enriched through creative expression in all its diversity.
- As Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs, as well as Culture, I am very aware of the complexity of Ontario's culture and of its richness.
- Ontario has a thriving arts and culture community.

- And, the Ontario government strongly supports this sector through a number of mechanisms.
- Our current policies are working well. We must be able to maintain these policies and set new ones as the need arises.
- One of our policies is to provide financial support to Ontario's arts and culture.
- For example, this year, the Ministry of Culture provided more than two hundred million dollars to its cultural agencies, including the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

- We are re-vamping some of our major cultural agencies, with the help of world-renowned architects.
- Daniel Liebeskind is re-building the Royal Ontario Museum, and Frank Gehry is renovating the Art Gallery of Ontario.
- Both of these organizations receive major financial support from the Ontario government.
- Tax credits are another example of Ontario's successful policies.
- Last year, it was clear that there were serious challenges in Ontario's film and television industry.

- In response to a higher Canadian dollar, increased competition from other jurisdictions and to counter the SARS aftermath we increased the film and television tax credits.
- This brought the results we wanted.
- In the independent film sector, performers worked nearly twice as many days last year as they did in 2004.
- During the past year, the film and television industry brought 934 million dollars into the provincial economy.

- I am very proud that, in 2005, the Ontario film industry held its own in this competitive environment.
- We are very satisfied we could re-energize the industry, considering that other countries have also taken similar measures to attract film production.
- The convention is especially important for all our cultural industries – not just film and television production – but also book and magazine publishing, sound recording and new media.
- They are the most likely targets of trade challenges.

- Culture contributes 17 billion dollars to Ontario's economy.* (**Statistics Canada 2004*)
- Culture accounts for more than two hundred and fifty-thousand direct jobs.* (**Statistics Canada 2004*)
- It is important that we protect these jobs, as well as the right to promote the distinctive and diverse voices of our artists.
- Technology and globalization are transforming our cultural industries.
- We must also have the right to create new policies that ensure our position in the global marketplace.

- You must be aware that, in Canada, Ontario has the most to lose if the convention does not come into effect.
- Ontario is the largest contributor to Canada's gross domestic product for culture.
- This could change, if our rights to invest in culture were challenged.
- I know our international guests feel as strongly as I do about the right of governments to promote cultural expression.
- I support your efforts to lobby your governments to ratify the convention.

- This brings me to the second point I would like to raise today -

- And, the point is that we are united in our understanding that the convention will:
 - 1. Recognize the distinctive nature of cultural goods and services as vehicles of values, identity and meaning;

 - 2. Clearly affirm the right of countries to have cultural policies that ensure diversity of cultural expression in their own country;

 - 3. Include provisions to support developing countries in their own emerging cultural industries;

- 4. Assert the legal status of the convention in international law;

- 5. Commit countries to consider the provisions of the convention when interpreting other international agreements; and,

- 6. Include a mechanism to settle disputes.

- The UNESCO convention calls for the right to have policies such as tax credits for film and television producers, and subsidies for museums and theatre companies.

- It also supports our right to maintain our policy of national content quotas and foreign ownership rules.
- Canada's Coalition for Cultural Diversity has worked hard at home and abroad to rally the cultural community in support of the convention.
- The coalition has acted as a role model internationally, and helped create similar coalitions in other countries.
- Ontario is a keen supporter of the work of Canada's coalition.

- I am pleased to say, as my third point today, that we will continue our support of the coalition.
- Last spring, we co-hosted discussions with members of the coalition, the federal government's delegation to UNESCO, and Ontario's cultural community.
- At meetings of the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers of Culture and Heritage, we agreed to work together in support of Canada's leading role on the convention.
- Our culture defines who we are. It reflects our inclusive and tolerant society and the freedom of expression we cherish.

- We must encourage the development of this freedom worldwide.
- I am pleased that Ontario has been a key supporter of Canada as the first country to ratify the convention, in November 2005.
- Ontario will continue to play a leading role, along with Québec, in support of the UNESCO convention.
- I will collaborate with the new federal Heritage Minister, and I will support the efforts of the federal government.
- It is good to hear that there are more coalitions forming around the world, to

ensure the convention is ratified as soon as possible.

- We must work together to ensure that the convention's objectives and principles translate into concrete action.
- I hope to see the UNESCO Convention on the Diversity of Cultural Expression become a reality worldwide.
- Thank you.