
Okinawa Declaration on Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage

March 27th, 2004

Realizing the importance of the *Utaki** as the venue for rituals of the communities in Okinawa and the dual character of its intangible and tangible heritage;

Inspired by the rituals presented to us by the people on Taketomi Island, but concerned by the actual state of many *Utaki* elsewhere in Okinawa;

Confirming that such rituals, characteristic of the *Utaki* belief system, are an invaluable example of cultural diversity in the world;

Reaffirming that the international community recognizes that cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature, as expressed by UNESCO’s Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), the Nara Document on Authenticity (1994) and many other international and regional documents;

Acknowledging that traditional belief systems and their associated “cultural spaces” are increasingly under threat in Okinawa and elsewhere in the world;

* *Utaki* are sacred spaces characteristic of the Okinawa islands, the southernmost islands of Japan. Many of these sacred spaces are small forests or woods where tropical trees and plants grow. In the *Utaki*, are ancestors, divinities from nature such as trees and cereals, or founders of villages are worshipped. Many ceremonies take place here throughout the year. It is the place to which local people feel that their heart belongs, and at the same time it serves as the repository of common memory, and diverse intangible cultural heritages such as songs or dances.

Recognizing that these threats include

- (1) rapidly changing social and political environments and consequent changes of cultural values, particularly in the younger generations,
- (2) lack of awareness among decision-makers, which can lead to insensitive development programs,
- (3) exposure to unsustainable tourism, and
- (4) conservation measures which give undue weight to material aspects of heritage, without adequate attention to the meaning of associated traditions, rituals, and practices for the community;

Therefore

We, the participants of the Okinawa International Forum 2004, “Utaki in Okinawa and Sacred Spaces in Asia: Community Development and Cultural Heritage” hereby declare that

- 1 Awareness-raising, community involvement, local capacity building, and documentation are necessary conditions to ensure the sustainability of the intangible cultural heritage;
- 2 Awareness-raising is best fostered by recognition of the importance of intangible cultural heritage by, among others, the international community, as this recognition empowers local communities to protect and further develop their intangible cultural heritage;
- 3 The built and/or natural environment (including cultural landscapes) often plays an irreplaceable role for the manifestation of intangible cultural heritage;
- 4 Integrated actions aiming at safeguarding simultaneously elements of the intangible cultural heritage and associated “cultural spaces” need to be rooted in the values and wishes of communities or groups concerned,

And consequently,

We, the participants, strongly urge all governments and concerned institutions to organize meetings of experts and all those concerned both in the various domains of the intangible and tangible heritage, to explore future cooperation among those responsible for implementation of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage.

The “*Okinawa Declaration on Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage*” (herein after the Okinawa Declaration) was adopted at the Okinawa International Forum 2004 “*UTAKI in Okinawa and Sacred Spaces in Asia: Community Development and Cultural Heritage*” held at the National Theatre Okinawa on March 27th, 2004, organized by the Japan Foundation and Okinawa Prefectural Government, and supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, and the Agency of Cultural Affairs. The drafting of the *Okinawa Declaration* began as a discussion in a small working group called by Mr. MASUDA Kanefusa, who acted as a coordinator of the Okinawa International Forum 2004. This working group consisted of Mr. KAMINO Yoshiharu, Mr. KONO Toshiyuki, Mr. Rieks SMEETS, Mr. Herb STOVEL, and Mr. MASUDA himself. Under the leadership of Mr. KONO, the working group discussed the elements to be included in the *Okinawa Declaration* for three months prior to the Forum. The outcome of the working group’s discussion was presented at the meeting of panelists held on March 26th, and after this discussion to which all present panelists participated, the draft of the *Okinawa Declaration* was produced. This draft of the *Okinawa Declaration* was presented at the public Forum on the following day, and adopted by agreement of all those present.

The panelists who participated in the drafting and adoption of the “*Okinawa Declaration of Intangible and Tangible Cultural Heritage*” are as follows (in alphabetical order).

ANG Choulean (Director of the Department of Culture and Research, the Authority for the Protection and the Management of Angkor and the Region of Siemreap, Cambodia)

ASATO Susumu (Director of the Department of Culture, the Board of Education, Urasoe-City, Japan)

BISE Hiroko (President, Urban Science Associates, Japan)

Joycelyn BOLHAYON-MANANGHAYA (Heritage Conservation Officer, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, the Philippines)

CHAO Chi-Fang (Assistant Professor, National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan)

CHEN Yong-Long (Director, Workshop for Bio-Cultural Diversity, Taiwan)

FUJIOKA Keitaro (Assistant Manager, Streets Section, City and Regional Development Bureau, Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, Japan)

HAGIO Toshiaki (Head, Cultural Property Section, Culture Department, Okinawa Prefecture Agency of Education, Japan)

HIGASHIDE Noriko (Acting Director, South East Asian Mountain People’s Culture and Development Highland Research Institute, Thailand)

KAMINO Yoshiharu (Professor, Musashino Art University, Japan)

KONO Toshiyuki (Professor, Kyushu University, Japan)

MASUDA Kanefusa (Professor, Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, Visiting Professor, Ritsumeikan University, Japan)

OSHIRO Manabu (Director of Planning and Production, National Theatre Okinawa, Japan)

Rieks SMEETS (Chief, Intangible Heritage Section, Division of Cultural Heritage, UNESCO)

Herb STOVEL (Coordinator, World Heritage Convention, ICCROM)

UESEDO Tomoko (Head Priest, Kihoin Temple in Taketomi Island, Japan)

*The information above is as of March, 2004.