



27 January 2021

Excellency,

I have the honour to enclose herewith a preliminary concept note for the one-day High-level Event on “Culture and Sustainable Development”, to be held on Friday, 21 May 2021, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 74/320 of 16 January 2020 entitled “Culture and Sustainable Development”.

This high-level event will be convened under the theme “Building back better: towards a more resilient and impactful culture sector, throughout COVID-19 and the Decade of Action”. The event will highlight the best practices and policy adaptations needed to ensure the cultural and creative industries’ contributions to COVID-19 relief and recovery strategies, and to fully realize culture’s transformational potential as an underutilized accelerator for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Further updates and a draft programme will be circulated in due course.

For further information, your office may contact my Advisers Mr. Mohammed Amin Shaker (mohammed.shaker@un.org) and Mr. Shaoxuan Liu (shaoxuan.liu@un.org).

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Volkan BOZKIR

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



High-level Event on Culture and Sustainable Development
*on the occasion of the World Day for Cultural Diversity
for Dialogue and Development*



**“Building back better: towards a more resilient and impactful
culture sector, throughout COVID-19 and the Decade of Action”**
21 May 2021, United Nations Headquarters, New York

Background

Culture is an essential component of human development, representing a source of identity, connection, innovation and creativity. Tangible and intangible cultural expressions have the demonstrated ability to drive social inclusion, poverty eradication, responsible environmental stewardship, sustainable economic growth and ownership of development processes. In recognition of culture and creativity’s crucial contribution to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across its 17 Goals, the United Nations General Assembly designated 2021 as the International Year of Creative Economy for Sustainable Development.

At the heart of the creative economy are the cultural and creative industries (CCIs), standing at the crossroad of arts, culture, commerce and technology. CCIs encompass numerous industries including visual and performing arts, music, film, television, radio, publishing, architecture and advertising among others. These sectors are some of the most rapidly growing in the world , contributing to 3% of global GDP and 30 million jobs worldwide. The cultural and creative industries also employ more young people aged 15-29 than any other sector.

The creative economy faces numerous challenges, related to the status of artists and cultural professionals and organisations, that have limited its potentially transformative contributions to sustainable development. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these pre-existing challenges, with the mobility of artists, market access, intellectual property rights, artistic freedoms and livelihoods, and funding for cultural organisations having been severely affected. New challenges have also emerged, as the CCIs have undergone an accelerated digital transition due to the closure of cultural spaces, and the cancelling of physical performances, caused by the pandemic. Against this backdrop, the Internet has come to the forefront of cultural consumption and production during lockdown periods. Yet the remuneration from online activities has rarely amounted to livelihoods.

The effects of the pandemic have also threatened the safeguarding of cultural heritage sites and practices. Furthermore, those without internet access – amounting to roughly half the global population – have struggled to exercise their right to participate in cultural life. Culture’s relationship with innovative technologies and information and communication technologies (ICTs), and their role in shaping the future of the creative economy throughout COVID-19 and beyond, will therefore depend on global progress on issues such as addressing the digital divide and ICT infrastructure, copyright protection and capacity building for CCIs, securing fair remuneration for digital content, and safeguarding of local and diverse content.

The current global crisis has also brought to light the critical contribution of culture to collective well-being and the shift of societal mindsets towards sustainable consumption and production patterns and living in harmony with nature. This heightened appreciation for the arts and CCIs presents an opportunity to escalate multilateral partnerships and amplify culture’s contributions to sustainable development in the consciousness of both policymakers and the public. The crisis has also stressed the informality of many components of the cultural and creative industries, which has often prevented the design of appropriate measures that benefit their entire creative value chains, impacting strategies to protect these industries and their workers throughout the pandemic. This major fault line urges countries to support the rights and livelihoods of cultural workers in the informal economy.

A renewed focus on promoting the development of the cultural and creative industries globally can unlock culture's transformative potential in accelerating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This includes through cultivating youth employment and entrepreneurship; transitioning economies to higher productivity and high-value-added sectors by promoting diversification – including locally-based production – technological upgrading, research and innovation, sustainable tourism, performing arts and heritage conservation; as well as life-long learning, cultural diversity, social cohesion, and respect for human rights.

While the pandemic disrupted the culture sector and deepened its pre-existing vulnerabilities, 2021 must serve as an opportunity to lay the foundations for *building back better*. Coordinated actions, strong commitments from states, international actors, private sector and stakeholders, as well as sound cultural policies and escalated investments in culture, are key for the creation of enabling environments for the creative economy and culture at large. The role of artists and cultural professionals and organisations in achieving the 2030 Agenda, as well as the integration of culture and the creative economy into national economic development plans, must be underlined, while the often insufficient social and economic support for cultural practitioners must be simultaneously addressed. Strengthened and strategic engagement of the global cultural and creative sectors in SDG implementation efforts can serve to ensure the full participation of communities and build the broad coalitions for action needed to fulfil our pledge to *leave no one behind*.

Mandate and Objective

In accordance with the General Assembly Resolution 74/230, the President of the General Assembly will convene a one-day high-level event on Culture and Sustainable Development in partnership with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). This event, which will be held on Friday 21 May 2021, the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, will highlight the resilient and transformative role of culture as an accelerator of SDG implementation, as well as the challenges within the cultural and creative industries and the broader cultural ecosystem that were exposed and exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Its overall theme shall be **“Building back better: towards a more resilient and impactful culture sector throughout COVID-19 and The Decade of Action”**. It will, inter alia, provide the opportunity for Member States to share experiences on crisis-response measures to support the creative economy during the pandemic; identify implementation gaps and solutions; and call for strengthening strategic cross-sectoral partnerships to unlock the transformative potential of culture in the recovery context and throughout the Decade of Action.

The objectives of the High-level Event on Culture and Sustainable Development are to:

1. Promote the mainstreaming of culture into SDGs implementation plans across the UN system and at national and regional levels, including within COVID-19 recovery strategies, in order to accelerate the attainment of the SDGs social, economic and environmental pillars.
2. Support innovative national policies and best practices in creative economy development, including by identifying bottlenecks to progress and highlighting solutions.

3. Highlight the role played by artists and cultural professionals and organisations in the creative and cultural industries, and consider means to improve their status marked by precarious social and economic conditions, taking into account the impact, opportunities and challenges of the digital environment.
4. Increase the overall support for the creative and cultural industries as drivers of sustainable development, as well as engage artists and cultural professionals as change makers through partnerships and consultations across the UN system.
