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Panel on Home Affairs

**Background brief prepared by the Legislative Council Secretariat
for the meeting on 11 February 2011**

Territory-wide survey on intangible cultural heritage in Hong Kong

Purpose

This paper provides background information on the Administration's territory-wide survey on intangible cultural heritage ("ICH") in Hong Kong, and highlights the concerns of members of the Panel on Home Affairs ("the Panel") about the survey.

Background

Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

2. In October 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization adopted the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage ("the Convention"). Following the ratification of the Convention by China (one of the 30 State Parties bound by the Convention) and as agreed by the Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Convention has applied to Hong Kong since 7 December 2004.

Meaning and characteristics of ICH

3. The Convention defines ICH as the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills, as well as the instruments, objects,

artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. According to the Convention, ICH is manifested in the following domains:

- (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of ICH;
- (b) performing arts;
- (c) social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and
- (e) traditional craftsmanship.

4. Under the Convention, ICH to be preserved should possess the following characteristics:

- (a) being transmitted from generation to generation;
- (b) being constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, interaction with nature, and history;
- (c) providing communities and groups with a sense of identity and continuity;
- (d) promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity;
- (e) being compatible with international human rights instruments; and
- (f) complying with the requirements of mutual respect among communities and of sustainable development.

ICH inventory

5. The Convention requires each State Party to identify and define the various elements of ICH present in its territory, with the participation of communities, groups and relevant non-governmental organizations

("NGOs"). To ensure identification of ICH, each State Party is required to draw up, in a manner geared to its own situation, one or more ICH inventories, which would need to be updated regularly.

Territory-wide survey on ICH in Hong Kong

Preparation

6. In compliance with the Convention, which took effect in April 2006, the Administration planned to conduct a territory-wide survey on ICH in Hong Kong with a view to establishing an ICH inventory. In this connection, the Administration commissioned in 2006 the Division of Humanities of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology to carry out a pilot study on ICH in Hong Kong. The study made reference to the 78 ICH items on the first provincial ICH list of Guangdong, and found that 34 were relevant to Hong Kong. Its report also made recommendations on how the survey should be conducted, including the methodology and composition of survey teams. In July 2008, the Secretary for Home Affairs appointed the Intangible Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee ("ICHAC") to advise the Administration on the conduct of the survey.

Scope

7. At the Panel meeting on 20 March 2009, the Administration informed members of its plan to engage academics from local academic institutes to conduct the survey. The survey would be divided into two field survey areas, each covering nine districts:

- (a) Survey Area A: North, Tai Po, Sha Tin, Sai Kung, Wong Tai Sin, Kwun Tong, Kowloon City, Sham Shui Po and Yau Tsim Mong; and
- (b) Survey Area B: Yuen Long, Tuen Mun, Tsuen Wan, Kwai Tsing, Islands, Central & Western, Wan Chai, Eastern and Southern.

Methods

8. The field survey would record and document ICH items in the survey areas in the following manner:

- (a) discussion with local informants to establish the locality, timing, event programme and bearers of ICH;
- (b) oral history survey with the identified ICH bearers on details of the heritage items;
- (c) photographic and video recording of the particular event in which ICH takes place; and
- (d) collection of instruments, objects, artifacts and documents associated with ICH items.

Timetable

9. According to the Administration, the survey has commenced since the second half of 2009, and the work is expected to be completed in the first half of 2012.

Members' concerns

10. The concerns expressed by members of the Panel about the survey are highlighted in the ensuing paragraphs.

Methodology of the survey

11. A member enquired about the methodology of the survey for drawing up the ICH inventory. The Administration responded that it would adopt a bottom-up approach in identifying and defining the various ICH items present in Hong Kong, with the participation of the communities, groups and relevant NGOs, in particular the 18 District Councils.

Selection criteria

12. Members enquired about whether the selection criteria should be established prior to the scrutiny and assessment of the ICH items identified by the survey.

13. The Administration responded that the survey would be carried out on the advice of ICHAC, and the survey findings would be used for compiling the inventory. As professional input from experts familiar with local history and cultural origin was required to work out the

inventory, relevant experts and cultural bearers would be invited to advise ICHAC on the specific items identified by the survey. The Administration would make reference to the selection criteria adopted by the Guangdong authority, and if required, consult the public and the Panel in this regard.

14. A member asked whether a mechanism would be put in place for appeals against any decisions of not including a particular item in the inventory, and whether the Administration would still support traditional items (such as clan rituals and festive events in villages) which were worthy of preservation but were not included in the inventory.

15. The Administration responded that it would be vigilant in compiling the inventory to ensure that ICH items with cultural/traditional values, in particular those at risk of extinction or requiring urgent safeguarding, would be identified. Where the preservation of certain ICH items was not viable, proper documentation on them would be made for future reference.

Public consultation

16. Members asked whether the public would be consulted before the finalization of the inventory. The Administration responded that the survey would be conducted in an open and non-prescriptive manner, and members of the public might express their views on the ICH items to be preserved in the course of the survey.

Latest development

17. The Administration will brief the Panel on the progress of Phase 1 of the survey at its meeting on 11 February 2011.

Relevant papers

18. A list of relevant papers with their hyperlinks at the website of the Legislative Council is in the **Appendix**.

Appendix

Relevant documents on Territory-wide survey on Intangible Cultural Heritage in Hong Kong

Committee	Date of meeting	Minutes/Paper	LC Paper No.
Panel on Home Affairs	2009.3.20	Administration's paper on Territory-wide Survey on Intangible Cultural Heritage ("ICH") in Hong Kong	CB(2)1090/08-09(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0320cb2-1090-1-e.pdf
		Information note entitled "Intangible cultural heritage" prepared by Research and Library Services Division of the Legislative Council ("LegCo") Secretariat	IN10/08-09 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/sec/library/0809in10-e.pdf
		Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1462/08-09 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20090320.pdf
	2009.4.17	Paper provided by the Administration on the summary of the findings of the pilot study on ICH in Hong Kong by the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, and a full list of Guangdong's provincial ICH items and the list of the 34 items relevant to Hong Kong.	CB(2)1379/08-09(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/chinese/panels/ha/papers/ha0320cb2-1379-1-c.pdf (Chinese version only)
	2009.5.11	Updated information on the Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH provided by the Administration	CB(2)1514/08-09(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr08-09/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0320cb2-1514-1-e.pdf

2009.12.11	Proposal to undertake an overseas duty visit to study the experience relating to the development of sports and cultural software prepared by the LegCo Secretariat	CB(2)474/09-10(05) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ha/papers/ha1211cb2-474-5-e.pdf
	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)859/09-10 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20091211.pdf
2010.1.8	Paper on proposal to undertake an overseas duty visit to study the experience relating to the development of cultural software	CB(2)652/09-10(05) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ha/papers/ha0108cb2-652-5-e.pdf
	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1063/09-10 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20100108.pdf
2010.5.14	Paper on the proposed duty visit to study the experience relating to the development of cultural software in Japan and the Republic of Korea prepared by the LegCo Secretariat	CB(2)1499/09-10(01) http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ha/papers/hac b2-1499-1-e.pdf
	Minutes of meeting	CB(2)1978/09-10 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/panels/ha/minutes/ha20100514.pdf

House Committee	2010.6.4	Paper on proposed overseas duty visit to Japan and the Republic of Korea by the Panel on Home Affairs to the House Committee meeting on 4 June 2010	CB(2)1675/09-10 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr09-10/english/hc/papers/hc0604cb2-1675-e.pdf
	2010.12.17	Report of the Panel on Home Affairs on its duty visit to study the development of cultural software and preservation of ICH in Japan and the Republic of Korea	CB(2)507/10-11 http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/hc/papers/hc1217cb2-507-e.pdf

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