



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



Intangible
Cultural
Heritage

**CONVENTION FOR THE SAFEGUARDING OF
THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
SAFEGUARDING OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**SUBSIDIARY BODY FOR THE EXAMINATION OF NOMINATIONS
FOR THE REPRESENTATIVE LIST**

Fourth meeting
Paris, 10-14 May 2008

Nomination for inscription on the Representative List in 2009 (Reference No. 00190)	
A.	STATE PARTY: Mali
B.	NAME OF ELEMENT: The septennial re-roofing ceremony of the Kama Blon, sacred house of Kangaba
C.	<p>COMMUNITY(IES), GROUP(S) OR, IF APPLICABLE, INDIVIDUAL(S) CONCERNED:</p> <p>The septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon, the sacred house of Kangaba, is performed by the Keita, a Malinke clan that founded the Mali Empire. The principal activity of the Malinke living in the Sudan region is extensive farming, mainly of the food crops sorghum, cowpeas, fonio and maze.</p>
D.	<p>BRIEF TEXTUAL DESCRIPTION OF THE NOMINATED ELEMENT:</p> <p>The sacred house of Kangaba was built in 1653 and was probably the last Kama Blon of the Manden. According to tradition, this type of public building existed at the time of Sunjata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire. The Kama Blon (or House of Speech) is a sort of village senate where patriarchs and clans would debate public affairs.</p> <p>All the elements of the Kama Blon (the walls, the roof, the doors, and the numerous ornaments on the walls) and the objects and furniture inside it are full of symbols and meanings relating to the history, philosophy, religion and worldview of its keepers.</p> <p>The building is re-roofed every seven years, and on each occasion the ceremony takes place from Monday to Friday. The event, which brings together many populations of the Manden, is an opportunity to evoke the history and other aspects of the culture of the Manden (cosmogony, values and traditional references) through oral traditions. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen social bonds, settle conflicts, and predict the future of the Manden for the next seven years. The septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon is therefore a living cultural asset that is imbued with spirituality.</p> <p>Despite its modest dimensions, the sacred house of Kangaba has for centuries crystallized the past and the traditions of the Manden.</p>

1.	IDENTIFICATION OF THE ELEMENT
1.a.	<p>NAME OF ELEMENT:</p> <p>The septennial re-roofing ceremony of the Kama Blon, sacred house of Kangaba</p>
1.b.	<p>OTHER NAME(S) OF THE ELEMENT, IF ANY:</p> <p>Bulon ci (re-roofing of the Bulon)</p>
1.c.	<p>IDENTIFICATION OF THE COMMUNITY(IES), GROUP(S) OR, IF APPLICABLE, INDIVIDUAL(S) CONCERNED AND THEIR LOCATION:</p> <p>The septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon, the sacred house of Kangaba, is performed by the Keita, a Malinke clan that founded the Mali Empire. The principal activity of the Malinke living in the Sudan region, which stretches from Senegal to Côte d'Ivoire, is extensive farming, mainly of the food crops millet, sorghum, cowpeas, fonio, and maze.</p>
1.d.	<p>GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION AND RANGE OF THE ELEMENT:</p> <p>The village of Kaaba, or Kangaba, where the Kama Blon is located, is in the heartland of the Manden, 90 kilometres from Bamako. From the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, the Manden – a region in south-west Mali – was the mainstay of political power in the Nigerian Sudan: Mali, the second Sudanese hegemony, later took over Ghana's role as an intermediary between North Africa and Black Africa. The empire had a solid economy thanks to the gold and cereal crops it produced. Kangaba, which is situated in the administrative region of Koulikoro, partly owes its reputation to the sacred Kama Blon.</p> <p>Magnificently situated in the centre of the public square, or <i>bara</i>, of Kangaba, the Kama Blon is a circular construction made of earth (<i>banco</i>) and covered with a conical thatched roof. It measures four metres in diameter by five metres high. Its high walls, which are made of unfired brick covered with a <i>crépi</i> made of banco, are approximately 2.5 metres high. The building is associated with several sacred elements that surround it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the well; - the three silk-cotton trees; - the square platform known as the <i>wasí</i>; - the tomb of Mansa Seme, the founder and first priest of the sacred house; - poles that provide guidance on the customs.
1.e.	<p>DOMAIN(S) REPRESENTED BY THE ELEMENT:</p> <p>In accordance with the definition of the intangible cultural heritage and the domains in which it is manifested, as set out in the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage adopted by UNESCO in Paris on 17 October 2003, the septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon, sacred house of Kangaba, is manifested in the following domains: "oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage" and "social practices, rituals and festive events".</p>

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ELEMENT (CF. CRITERION R.1):

The Kama Blon of Kaaba (Kangaba), built in 1653, was probably the last Kama Blon of the Manden. According to tradition, this type of public building existed at the time of Sunjata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire. It is thought that it was then a Kuma Blon (or House of Speech) – a sort of village senate where patriarchs and clans would debate public affairs. The tradition of elders gathering in these public forums to discuss community problems is still alive in some Bambara and Malinke villages in Mali.

The septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon is a tradition that is kept by the traditional authorities, comprising the founding clans of the Mali Empire and griots bearing the patronymic Diabate, from the village of Kela, which is situated six kilometres to the south west of Kangaba. They are the custodians and keepers of the history of the Kama Blon and the Mali Empire. They understand and teach the genealogy of Sunjata Keita, founder of the Mali Empire, and Bemba Kanda, ancestor of the Keita clan and the chiefdom of Kangaba. They also possess magic knowledge that is feared and venerated.

All the elements of the Kama Blon (the walls, the roof, the doors, and the numerous ornaments on the walls) and the objects and furniture inside it are full of symbols and meanings relating to the history, philosophy, religion and worldview of its keepers.

The building is re-roofed every seven years. The event, which brings together many populations of the Manden, is an opportunity to evoke the history and other aspects of the culture of the Manden (cosmogony, values and traditional references) through oral traditions. It also provides an opportunity to strengthen social bonds, settle conflicts, and predict the future of the Manden for the next seven years. The Kama Blon is therefore a living cultural asset imbued with spirituality.

The re-roofing is carried out by young people aged 20 to 21 under the guidance of men and women who are aware of the social statute and morality of each young person. The men and women act as officers, guides and initiators for future generations and possess knowledge and expertise relating to the sacred house, both in terms of its physical appearance and its intangible cultural heritage.

The re-roofing always takes place from Monday to Friday in the following stages:

- the old roof is taken down;
- the first six bamboos of the roofing framework (sansara mansa) are assembled
- crépissage and whitewash are applied to the walls using black clay and kaolin respectively;
- the remaining bamboos for the roofing framework are assembled; straw is positioned on the framework;
- images and pictograms are painted on the walls;
- the procession of the Kela griots arrives and the Donkan – or homage to Sunjata – is performed;
- a vigil of recitations regarding the history of the Manden is held;
- traditional ceremonies are performed and the new roof is put in place.

3. CONTRIBUTION TO ENSURING VISIBILITY AND AWARENESS AND TO ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE (CF. CRITERION R.2):

The sacred house of Kangaba is an authentic historical testament not only to traditional architecture in the Sudanese region (with a circular platform and a conical thatched roof), but also to the social cohesion between all the communities of the Manden.

The septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon is a genuine masterpiece of human creative genius that brings together the founding clans of the Manden empire, the populations of the Manden, men, and griots, or wordsmiths, to evoke the ancient history and the cultural traditions and expressions (tales, legends, epics, myths, proverbs, songs, and so on) of the Manden. The oral expressions and traditions associated with the sacred house are lasting resources for rewriting the history of the Manden and western Sudan. The practice has existed for over five centuries. The sacred nature of the tradition and the fact that it has been preserved by a clan that guards it fiercely have ensured its continuation, its resistance to change, and its authenticity.

The populations of the Manden and their diaspora, which retain a strong attachment to the Kama Blon, will continue to use their expertise to safeguard this important cultural heritage. For them, the septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon remains a potent symbol of cultural identity and a unifying site.

The participation of various communities of the Manden and the support of the political and administrative authorities ensure that the conservation of the Kama Blon and its associated cultural practices and traditions will continue to be kept alive in the long term.

The inscription of the septennial re-roofing of Kama Blon on the Representative List will make it possible to enhance and strengthen conservation and traditional management and promote the event at the national and international levels.

4. SAFEGUARDING MEASURES (CF. CRITERION R.3)

4.a. CURRENT AND RECENT EFFORTS TO SAFEGUARD THE ELEMENT:

Since gaining independence, Mali, through the Ministry of Culture, has made a sustained effort to preserve, revitalize and promote all the elements of the national cultural heritage.

In terms of legal instruments, it is worth noting the following:

Law N°85-40jAN-RM of 26 July 1985 relating to the protection and promotion of the National Cultural Heritage;

Law N°86-61jAN-RM of 26 July 1986 relating to the profession of trader in cultural assets;

Law N°06-041jAN-RM of 11 August 2006 authorizing the ratification of the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, adopted in Paris on 20 October 2005 by the Thirty-third session of the General Conference of UNESCO;

Ruling N°04-023/p-RM of 16 September 2004 authorizing the ratification of the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in Paris on 17 October 2003 by the Thirty-second session of the General Conference of UNESCO;

Decree N°2D3/PG-RM of 13 August 1985 instituting the National Commission for the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage;

Decree N° 275jPG-RM of 4 November 1986 relating to the regulation of archaeological excavation;

Decree N°299jPG-RM of 19 September 1986 relating to the regulation of the prospection, sale and export of cultural assets;

Decree N°04-486jP-RM of 26 October 2004 ratifying the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, adopted in Paris on 17 October 2003 by the Thirty-second session of the General Conference of UNESCO.

As a result of Decision N°444/MC-SG of 07 May 2001 on including cultural assets in the inventory, the Kama Blon was included on the national cultural heritage inventory and classed part of the national cultural heritage on 7 December 2005.

Knowledge and expertise relating to the sacred house is handed down in a traditional way through teaching and practice. The young people aged 20-21 provide a framework for preserving and upholding social values among the Malinke.

In addition to the measures described above, there is a body of documentation (photos, mission reports, and so on) relating to the festivities of the septennial re-roofing of the sacred house.

The Ministry of Culture, by means of the National Directorate for Cultural Heritage, is assisting custodian communities by providing practical advice on protection and dissemination, and it participates in each septennial re-roofing of the sacred house.

However, since the financial resources of the National Directorate for Cultural Heritage are limited in proportion to the volume of activities they cover, local communities have taken it upon themselves to organize the festivities of the septennial re-roofing of the sacred house, regardless of the cost.

These days, the event attracts people from all regions of Mali, the Malian diaspora, and foreign tourists. The event will next take place in 2011. The most recent one took place in 2004.

4.b. SAFEGUARDING MEASURES PROPOSED:

The safeguarding measures proposed above will be implemented by the National Directorate for Cultural Heritage, its regional and local offices, and the municipal and community authorities in Kangaba.

N°	Activity	Methodology	Period	Executong Agency	Costs US\$	
					Committee Funds	Contribution of Mali
1.	Documentation (documentary research, purchase of documents, transfer to electronic format, reprographics, binding) Defining data gathering tools Selecting and training local researchers	Stage 1: Planning and preparatory work	October – December 2009	National Directorate for Cultural Heritage	4,000	
2.	Information, awareness-raising and communication; Convening of exchange meetings; Collection of data from local communities; Audiovisual and photographic documentation	Stage 2: Implementation of activities on the ground	January - June 2010	National Directorate for Cultural Heritage Local administrative authorities Municipal authorities; Traditional authorities	10,000	
3.	Interpretation and analysis of data; Initial classification of results.	Stage 3: Data analysis and processing	July – September 2010	National Directorate for Cultural Heritage	5,000	
4.	Finalizing the information gathered; Writing of mission report; Creation of documentary; Establishment of data bank; Approval and distribution of documents produced; Evaluation of activities carried out	Stage 4: Creation of documents and evaluation	October - January 2011	National Directorate for Cultural Heritage Intergovernmental Committee for Safeguarding of the Tangible Cultural Heritage	6,000	
5.	Participation of national consultants Various (communication, travel, consumables)	All stages	October 2009- January 2011	National Directorate for Cultural Heritage		5,000
	Total				25,000	5,000
	Grand Total				30,000	

4.c. COMMITMENTS OF STATES AND OF COMMUNITIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONCERNED:

Since gaining independence in 1960, Mali has set out the priority areas of its cultural policy, which is based on three elements:

- Preserving national cultural identity;
- Promoting intercultural dialogue, as Mali is a country with great ethnic diversity;
- Promoting the cultural heritage at the national level.

In order to address these concerns, every political administration has respected and supported the clan that has custody of the sacred house of Kangaba, its preservation of

Kama Blon and the festivities relating to it. The participation of the Ministries of Culture, Crafts and Tourism, Labour and the Civil Service, and the Vice-President of the National Assembly in the re-roofing of the sacred house in April 2004 bears witness to this.

The populations of the Manden and their diasporas still have a strong attachment to the Kama Blon, which for them remains a potent symbol of cultural identity and a unifying site. The septennial re-roofing ceremonies remain authentic. The enthusiasm of the various communities of the Manden and the support of the political and administrative authorities help to ensure that the tradition of the septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon will stand the test of time.

The septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon, sacred house of Kangaba, is the most famous of the festivities relating to the re-roofing of the Kama Blon in the Manden and is renowned for the quantity and quality of its participants and the symbolism attached to it.

5. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT AND CONSENT (CF. CRITERION R.4)

5.a. PARTICIPATION OF COMMUNITIES, GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS:

On the order of mission N°0000122jMC-SG, a mission of the National Directorate for Cultural Heritage visited Kangaba from 16 to 20 May 2008 to discuss the status of the conservation of the Kama Blon with the administrative and traditional authorities.

The following results were achieved:

- Providing financial support for local authorities to enable them to organize the re-roofing festivities in a more efficient way;
- Strengthening measures to protect the sacred house by including it on the Representative List of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage;
- Initiating income-generating activities in order to identify young people to whom the knowledge and expertise relating to the sacred house can be handed down;
- Establishing an organizational committee for the festivities formed of the administration, the town hall and traditional leaders.

These results bear witness to the absolute commitment of the highest authorities in Mali and of the custodians of the sacred house of Kangaba to any measure that will make it possible to conserve the sacred house and hand down its traditions to future generations.

5.b. FREE, PRIOR AND INFORMED CONSENT:

See attached letter.

5.c. RESPECT FOR CUSTOMARY PRACTICES GOVERNING ACCESS:

The septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon, sacred house of Kangaba, is managed by traditional authorities formed of the founding clans of the Mali Empire, and Diabate griots from the village of Kela. They are the sole custodians and keepers of the history of the Kama Blon and the Mali Empire. No one else may intervene in the practices and traditions relating to the septennial re-roofing of the Kama Blon.

Inclusion on the inventory and the classification of this ritual as part of the national cultural heritage have helped to ensure that it is preserved and acknowledged at the national and international levels. The current proposal for inscription on the Representative List is a logical continuation that will make it possible to improve documentation and knowledge of the Kama Blon, its septennial re-roofing ceremony, and the practices and traditions associated with it.

During the mission of the National Directorate for Cultural Heritage that took place from 16 to 20 May 2008, the custodians of the practices and traditions of the Kama Blon requested that measures to protect the sacred house be stepped up by including it on the Representative List of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. All of the information will be collected and distributed with the utmost respect for and agreement of the custodians.

6. INCLUSION ON AN INVENTORY (CF. CRITERION R.5):

The Kama Blon, sacred house of Kangaba, was included on the inventory as a result of Decision N°444/MC-SG of 7 May 2001 on the inclusion of cultural assets on the inventory of the national cultural heritage and was classed part of the national cultural heritage on 7 December 2005.

The National Directorate for Cultural Heritage, which supports the communities that are the custodians of cultural assets, was established by Ruling N°01-27/p-RM of 2 August 2001 with the aim of inventorying, safeguarding, promoting and distributing all elements of the national cultural heritage.

7. DOCUMENTATION

7.a. REQUIRED AND SUPPLEMENTARY DOCUMENTATION:

Attached

7.b. CESSION OF RIGHTS:

Attached

7.c. LIST OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

8. CONTACT INFORMATION

8.a. SUBMITTING STATE PARTY: Mali

8.b. CONTACT PERSON FOR CORRESPONDENCE:

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8.c. COMPETENT BODY INVOLVED:

La Mairie de la Commune urbaine de Kangaba
Conseil de village de Kangaba

Autorités traditionnelles composées des clans fondateurs de l'Empire du Mali, des clans maraboutiques de Kangaba et des griots du patronyme Diabaté du village de Kéla, situé à 6 Km au sud ouest de Kangaba.

8.d. CONCERNED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION(S) OR REPRESENTATIVE(S):

Confrérie des chasseurs de Kangaba ;
Communauté des griots de Kéla.

9. SIGNATURE ON BEHALF OF THE STATE PARTY:

Klessigué SANOGO
Directeur National du Patrimoine Culturel
<signed>