Strengthening the Relationship with Indigenous Peoples: What Role for National Commissions
Insights from Canada and France

With the world about to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in September 2017 and UNESCO working to finalize its Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and the French National Commission for UNESCO wish to play an active role along with other National Commissions to help strengthen the relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

Sébastien Goupil and Laurella Rincon, the Secretaries-General of the two National Commissions, believe that the network of National Commissions is uniquely positioned to support this important priority, building on the universal values that UNESCO promotes. They expressed their interest to collaborate with other National Commissions across the various UNESCO Regions to support concrete and tangible actions to advance the spirit of the new UNESCO Policy on Engagement with Indigenous Peoples. The Canadian and French National Commissions have agreed to explore various ways to work together.

The Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCUNESCO) has already committed to playing an active role in supporting reconciliation efforts in Canada, a priority for all level of governments and civil society in this country. Through exchanges with its Indigenous members and partners, CCUNESCO is currently working on the development of a framework to guide its actions. It is built around three major, complementary aspects to support the meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples in its work and that of UNESCO, as follows:

1. **Celebrate and showcase initiatives that serve to strengthen the relationship with Indigenous peoples and demonstrate reconciliation in action**
   National Commissions can showcase initiatives, particularly those of their members and networks, which can inspire further action and serve as models nationally and internationally.

2. **Integrate Indigenous culture, knowledge and perspectives in the work of National Commissions**
   In order to be engaging, relevant and credible in the eyes of the National Commissions’ Indigenous interlocutors and partners, efforts are required to meaningfully integrate and reflect Indigenous culture, knowledge, perspectives and epistemologies in the work of National Commissions.

3. **Creating conditions that will encourage Indigenous Peoples to take ownership of UNESCO’s programs**
   National Commissions have the opportunity to raise awareness about the various UNESCO and National Commissions’ programs by demonstrating their value and relevance and creating conditions that will enable Indigenous Peoples to meaningfully participate in them.

CCUNESCO has already launched initiatives to express its strong commitment towards making a contribution to reconciliation efforts. For example, it has worked with UNESCO’s Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme to organize a special event with UNESCO in Paris, in April 2017, to showcase the first Indigenous-led Biosphere Reserve in the World, Tsá Tué, located in Canada’s Northwest Territories. The National Commission also supported the development of a reflection paper on Tsá Tué’s experience. CCUNESCO is currently exploring more structural initiatives to crystallize its commitment, including the development of knowledge mobilization strategies.
The French National Commission (CNFU) has engaged in a three year program in connection with the Ministry of Overseas France to help better implement UNESCO’s programs and policies in the overseas territories of France. Under this framework, CNFU will support initiatives to promote the cultural diversity and the expression of cultural identities of Indigenous Peoples, including in French Guyana and New Caledonia, where issues of protection of cultural and linguistic diversity of Indigenous Peoples are at stake. To this matter, CNFU will engage in the program developed by The World Cultures Institute (Maison des Cultures du Monde), starting with the exhibition on “Oral and graphic expressions of the Wayãpi” from Amazonia presented from May 13th to October 8th 2017, in the French Centre for Intangible Cultural Heritage (CFPCI) in Vitré.

The Canadian and the French National Commissions are inviting colleagues from other National Commissions to reach out to them should they wish to collaborate on this important priority. You are invited to contact either Sébastien Goupil or Laurella Rincon to join the conversation.