

Promoting culture: Experts urge Pakistan to ratify UN convention on culture

KARACHI: Speakers at a consultative workshop have urged Pakistan to ratify the United Nations' 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expression.

Experts gathered at the two-day workshop, organised by the United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at Beach Luxury hotel recently and made their case for the country to ratify the treaty, signed by 144 countries, and highlighted the significance of culture with regards to economic development.

"This [event] is a wonderful opportunity for a consultative dialogue on culture," said Sindh chief minister's culture adviser Sharmila Farooqi, who inaugurated the event. "In times like these where you have a law and order crisis in the country, few funds are allocated to the culture departments."

Culture usually thrives when it is repressed, she said on the evolution of culture in the country. "Our culture evolved the best in General Zia's era; music and art thrived under the various bans imposed at the time." She was also of the view that people associated with the field of culture need to reclaim the lost space.

Speaking at the first day's session, Balochistan culture secretary Noorul Haq said "A national policy on culture would best evolve not on paper but when it is owned by the people."

Talking about the presence of several archeological sites in the province and its other cultural aspects, Haq said if only the Baloch women knew how to market their local dresses with handcrafted embroideries, they would become successful entrepreneurs globally.

UNESCO consultant Salman Asif stressed the need for individual participation to have a substantial impact on preserving and promoting culture. On the same note, he called for wider, digitally-linked communities that are not only local but even global in their outreach.

Another strategist and expert from UNESCO, Andrew Senior, spoke at length about the guiding principles of the convention, besides verbally sharing case studies from around the world detailing how important a country's culture is to its economy.

On the second day, Senior, in his talk, said the responsibility [of ratifying the convention] sits at the national level. "It's a global opportunity for the economy to grow. The creative sector is employing more people than ever before," he said.

Senior explained that once the convention is ratified by the government, every four years the country will need to share with UNESCO what it has done in terms of cultural progress.

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