

ORAL HERITAGE – PRESERVATION AND PROMOTION (07/04/09)

(No. B/138) Mrs M. Martin (Second Member for Curepipe and Midlands) asked the Minister of Education, Culture and Human Resources whether he will state if a repertoire of our Oral heritage has been carried out and, if so-

- (a) by whom and
- (b) the measures put in place for the preservation and promotion thereof.

Reply: Before replying to this question, I would like at the outset to clear one issue to avoid any confusion.

Oral heritage, is, in fact, only one component of a broader process known as “*Intangible Cultural Heritage*”. The 2003 Convention for the “*Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage*”, to which Mauritius is a party, defines Intangible Cultural Heritage as the *practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.*

According to the Convention, Intangible Cultural Heritage is manifested in the following domains -

- (i) Oral traditions and expressions including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage;
- (ii) Performing arts (such as traditional music, dance and theatre);
- (iii) Social practices, rituals and festive events;
- (iv) Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe;
- (v) Traditional craftsmanship.

In Mauritius, we have inherited substantial age-old traditions and rituals from our ancestors pertaining to the birth of the child, his first day including the giving of names, songs and other rituals in connection with marriage ceremonies, forms of original sega and other forms of communications regarding costumes and food items for particular occasions.

These constitute an invaluable treasure, which needs to be safeguarded. In this respect, a comprehensive inventory has to be carried out to identify those Intangible Cultural Heritage that are worthy of being listed on the National and World Heritage lists.

The National Heritage Fund which, operates under the aegis of my Ministry and is the national body to handle heritage issues, is presently working on a project to compile an inventory, as comprehensive as possible, of Intangible Cultural Heritage for Mauritius and Rodrigues as well.

However, pending the finalization of that inventory, I am informed that there are several other institutions closely linked to heritage issues, which are already working for

the preservation and promotion of Intangible Cultural Heritage.

I am tabling a list of these institutions and their achievement in this field. The national inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage Project by the National Heritage Fund will integrate all the works carried out so far. It will also identify and capture other areas of Intangible Cultural Heritage not yet covered.

With regard to the Preservation of these works, I have to inform the House that all information collected is being preserved in the following forms – written, audio, visual and digitalized, as appropriate. Preservation of Intangible Cultural Heritage has already started and is an ongoing process as just mentioned earlier.

As far as promotion is concerned, same is being done through: -

- (i) Publications, seminars, conferences and survey reports;
- (ii) Documentaries and radio programmes conducted jointly with the MBC;
- (iii) Heritage information have been and is being integrated in the school curriculum of students;
- (iv) The organisation of activities in collaboration with socio cultural organizations on sirandanes and folk songs.

Once the National Inventory is completed, I intend to formulate a long-term strategy for the promotion of Intangible Cultural heritage in a structured manner.