

**Sub-Regional Experts Meeting in Asia on Intangible Cultural Heritage:
Safeguarding and Inventory-Making Methodologies
(Bangkok, Thailand, 13-16 December 2005)**

**GOVERNMENT MECHANISM FOR SAFEGUARDING INTANGIBLE
CULTURAL HERITAGE: BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**

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1. Introduction

Intangible cultural heritage is defined 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 (UNESCO definition).

It is passed down from generation to generation, and is constantly recreated by communities and groups, in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their historical conditions of existence. It provides people with a sense of identity and continuity, and its safeguarding promotes, sustains, and develops cultural diversity and human creativity.

2. Responsible Government Departments:

The Brunei Government Departments involved in safeguarding intangible cultural heritage are:

- a) Brunei Museums Department
- b) Brunei History Centre
- c) Language and Literature Bureau
- d) Radio Television Brunei
- e) University of Brunei Darussalam

The Brunei Museums Department was first set up in 1965 and its main objective is collecting, preserving, conducting research and exhibiting Brunei's tangible as well as intangible cultural heritage. Two sections under the Brunei Museums Department involved in documenting and safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage are the Archives Section and the Ethnography Section.

The Archives Section i.e. through the Oral History Section conducts research on folktales and other oral traditions through interviews, recording and collecting historical data such as books, documents and letters. The Ethnography Section focuses more on the research on culture of the seven ethnics in Brunei Darussalam which includes intangible cultural heritage such as music, dances and way of life.

3. Mechanism for Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage

3.1 Legal Framework

Brunei Museums Department implements four (4) acts:

- a) Antiquities and Treasure Trove [1967]
- b) National Archives Act [1975]
- c) Wildlife Protection Act [1978]
- d) Book Preservation Act [1975]

In relation with safeguarding Intangible cultural heritage, two (2) of the above mention acts are involved i.e. the Book Preservation Act and the National Archives Act.

Under these acts, the respective responsible agencies are required to submit copies of published materials such as books, photographs, video, film and audio-tapes on Brunei Culture to the National Archives of Brunei Darussalam.

3.2 Research

- 3.2.1 The research areas covered are the seven (7) indigenous ethnic population of Brunei Darussalam i.e. the Brunei Malay, Kedayan, Tutong, Dusun, Bisaya, Belait and Murut. Other research covers the Chinese, Indian, Iban and the nomadic Penan. Topics covered in the research are music, dances, recitation, folktale, poetry, oral narratives, proverb and language.
- 3.2.2 Research methods include book reference, conducting interviews, video-taping and participant observation.
- 3.2.3 Data collected from the research are transcribed, catalogued and analyzed for the purpose of publication and for future reference.

3.3 Seminars, workshops and meeting of experts on intangible culture

Government agencies such as the University of Brunei Darussalam, Language and Literature Bureau, Brunei History Centre and Brunei Museums Department occasionally organizes seminars, workshops and conferences through various groups of working committees that consist of experts in various fields relating to cultural studies. Examples are workshop on Traditional Games in Kg. Bukit Udal [2005] and various workshops on research methods in oral traditions and culture organised by the Brunei Museums Department, Language and Literature Bureau and the Brunei History Centre.

3.4 Publication and Documentation

Each government department mentioned is responsible in publishing and distributing any research findings. Examples of published books written on intangible cultural heritage by the Brunei Museums Department are *Petuturan I* (Folklores I) [published in 1985] and *Petuturan II* (Folklore II) [published in 1986] by Matassim bin Haji Jibah, *Petuturan III* (Folklore III) [published in 1995] by Suhaili Haji Hassan, *Petuturan IV* (Folklore IV) [Published in 2005] by Dk. Mardinah Pg. Haji Omar and *Adat Perkahwinan Etnik-Etnik di Negara Brunei Darussalam* (Wedding Customs of the ethnics of Negara Brunei Darussalam) [published in 2004] co-edited by Dk. Norazah Pg. Haji Muhammad and Masnah Amit. Other writings on intangible heritage are published in the department's news magazine, *Berita Muzium*.

3.5 Cultural performances

Cultural performances such as dances, songs and musics are performed during national celebrations and formal functions. These cultural performances are usually broadcasted through television and radio waves as efforts to introduce and expose Brunei's intangible cultural heritage to the public. Examples of cultural performances organised are the *Diangdangan*¹ performance during the International Museums Day 2003 and the Wedding Customs performance during the Wedding Exhibition in 2004.

3.6 Exhibitions

The Brunei Museums Department has various exhibition galleries including the Brunei Malay Culture that portrays the customs and traditions of the Brunei Malays since birth till marriage. Temporary exhibitions are also conducted on various aspects of the tangible and intangible culture of the seven ethnics of Brunei Darussalam such as the *Pameran Padi* (Paddy Exhibition) in 1988, *Pameran Permainan dan Sukan Tradisi* (Games and Traditional Sports Exhibition) in 1989, *Pameran Alat Bunyi-Bunyian dan Muzik Tradisi* (Musical Instruments and Traditional Music Exhibition) and *Pameran Raja Sehari* (Wedding Exhibition) in 2004.

4. Conclusion

The importance of safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage should be made aware for everyone especially to those responsible agencies in order to ensure that our cultural heritage is well preserved and protected. Therefore the Brunei Darussalam government is working towards implementing the above mentioned mechanisms in efforts to preserving, disseminating and safeguarding Brunei's intangible cultural heritage for the future generation to appreciate and be proud of.

¹ A traditional Malay Brunei song sung in verses to narrate tales. The *Diangdangan* is usually performed by a man who beats a drum called *dumbak* to accompanying the singing.