

Text and pictures DAC, CF Team



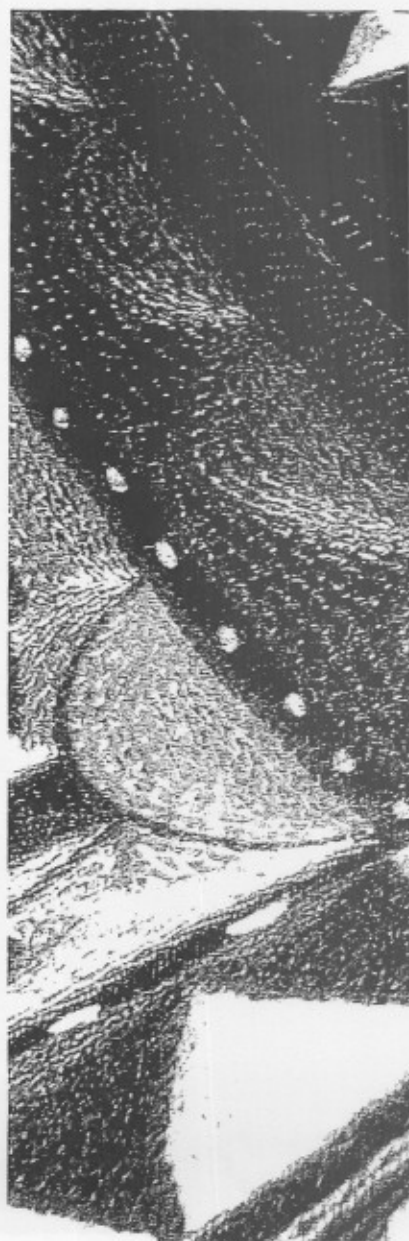
DEVELOPING CULTURE, DEVELOPING OUR NATION

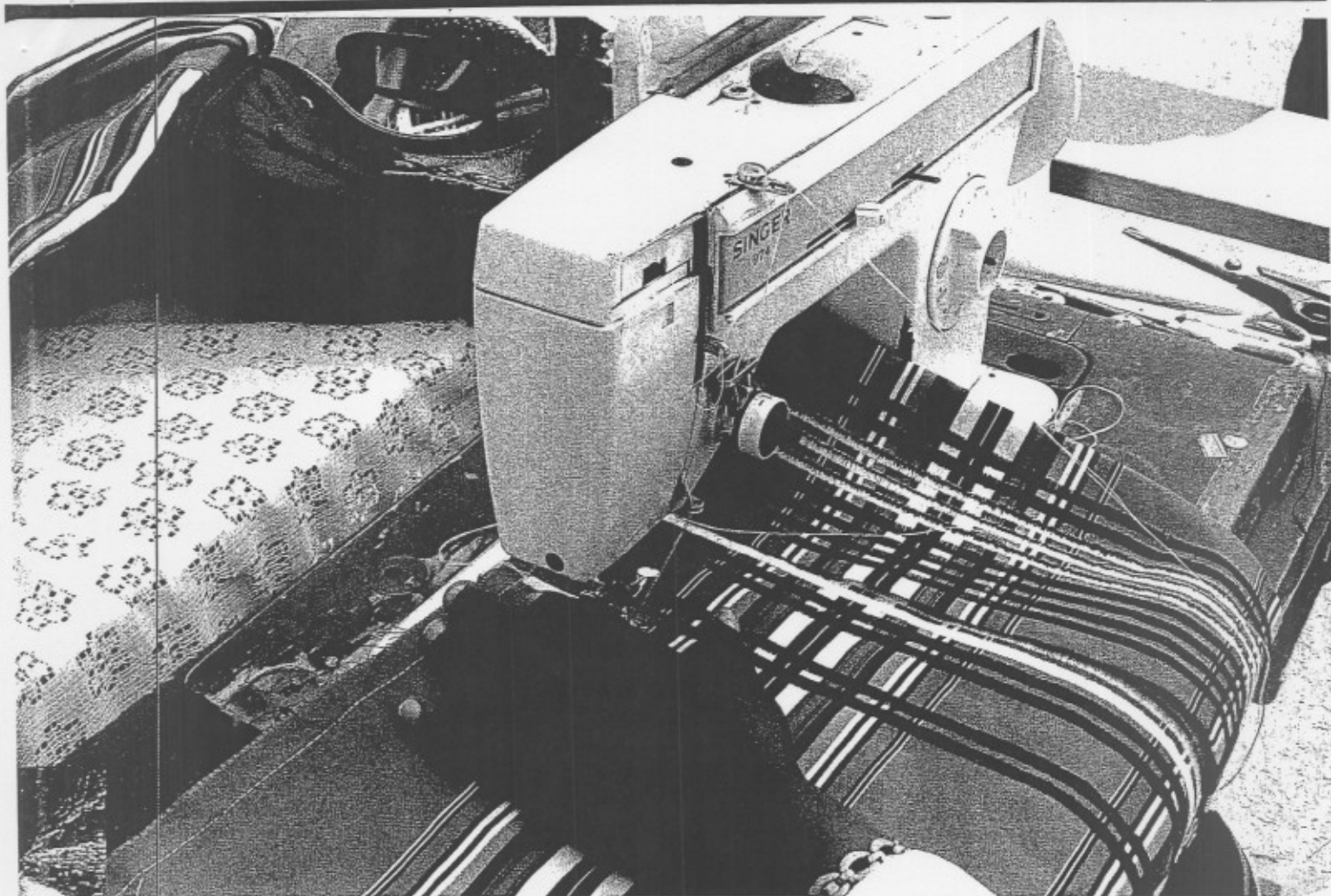


In October 2005 at the 33rd General Conference of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), representatives of 154 states – including South Africa – attending the plenary session cheered the adoption of the Report of Commission IV (Culture) and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions. This follows the unanimous adoption in November 2001 of the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

The Declaration is a set of twelve articles, which are considered to be guiding principles, for the creation of a more peaceful and equitable society based on mutual respect and tolerance.

It strives to recognise cultural diversity not as a mere fact but as a source of innovation, exchange and creativity, which constitute humanity's fundamental strengths. The Declaration was drawn up after it was realised that there was a need for a legally binding instrument that protects the individual artistic expressions of all the citizens of the world, and prevents the exploitation of marginalised communities or the monopolisation of related world markets. Such artistic expressions can take any form, be it music, food, craft items,





Left: Dr Pallo Jordan and Prof Kader Asmal, Middle: Kaross embroidery, Above: Sewing machine.

film, or more. To cite an example that we as South Africans will be familiar with – the song ‘Mbube’, composed by Zulu musician Solomon Linda, was taken and used under other names (‘Wimoweh’, ‘The Lion Sleeps Tonight’) and in ways that the composer never dreamed or intended.

‘The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions has been adopted, but not ratified by UNESCO,’ explained Ruphus Matibe, Director for International Relations at the Department of Arts and Culture. We caught up with him just a couple of weeks before a very important conference was due to take place – the Africa and Diaspora Conference to address Cultural Diversity for Social Cohesion and Sustainable Development, which will be held at Sun City from 11 to 15 September. The DAC, in partnership with the South African National Commission for UNESCO, and UNISA, will host this groundbreaking conference. ‘So it is not yet a legal UNESCO instrument. For this to happen it must be ratified, that is, put into cabinet and legally approved, by at least 30 nations. Then it becomes binding to all countries.’ He went on to say that South Africa is in the process of ratifying the Convention, which has already been ratified by Canada, Mauritius and France. ‘We wanted to be the first,’ said Mr Matibe, ‘because of the important role we played during negotiations but the other countries had quicker processes!’

It is clear that this is an issue of the utmost importance to the DAC. The Africa and Diaspora Conference is expected to attract over 400 international delegates and participants from English, French, Portuguese, Swahili and Spanish Africa, the Diaspora and

the Caribbean, and is a follow-up to various conference initiatives undertaken throughout Africa and the Diaspora with regard to the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

The conference, comprising a main plenary session and six breakaway groups, aims to support Africa’s socio-economic Renaissance by providing a platform for dialogue and lobbying for common policies on the protection and promotion of cultural diversity, and the important role that culture can play in promoting peace and security on our continent and in other similar environments across the world. Prominent speakers on programme include, among others, Minister of Arts and Culture Dr Z. Pallo Jordan; Prof Kader Asmal; Moustapha Tambaou from the Senegalese Ministry of Culture; Mr Sydney Bartley, Jamaican Director-General of Culture Jamaica; Prof Sophie Bo Oluwole, Professor of Philosophy from Nigeria; Prof Itumeleng Mosala, Director-General of the Department of Arts and Culture and Nicola Danby, CEO of BASA South Africa.

What exactly does this mean for us in South Africa? Think of the many beautiful items of outstanding quality that are produced by talented South Africans in the fields of craft, music, film, and more. The local craft industry, for instance, has experienced a surge in growth that has seen it become the sole means of employment for over a million empowered people, become a powerful poverty alleviation strategy, and contribute over R3 billion to the economy annually. ‘There is a great demand for the consumption of cultural goods,’ said Matibe, ‘but in many cases producers in the rural areas of developing countries such as Sou

Left: Fabric shop,
Middle: Mukondeni Pots,
Right: Kaross portrait
embroidery.

Africa either have poor or no access to the international market, or they are crowded out by bigger players. Imported goods, as opposed to local products, often get preference and this has a negative impact on our employment situation and our economy. With the Convention being put into place, you will find that preferential treatment will now be given to developing markets.

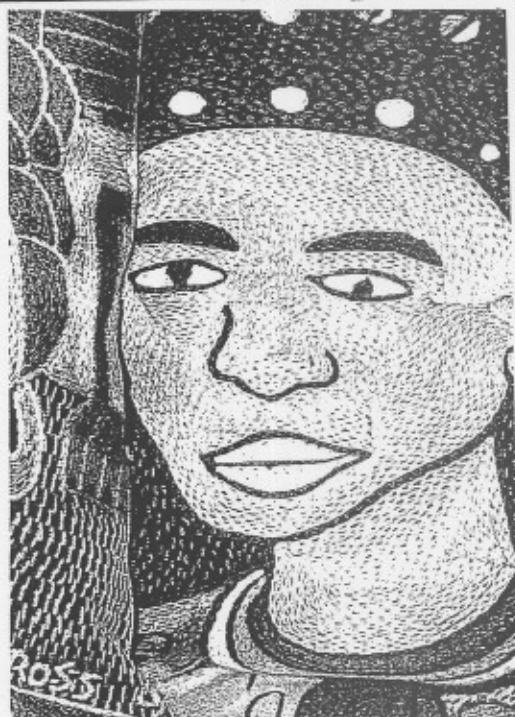
'This imbalance in the trade of cultural goods and services is an important topic for discussion at the conference. We need to establish original national strategies for implementation, not just in South Africa but in the whole of the SADEC region, of the principles of the UNESCO Convention. In other words, we need to get our cultural goods to the EU markets, to the American markets, but some of our neighbours might not have the capacity to achieve this. However, by working together we will be able to effectively implement policies and strategies to accomplish our goals. Strong south/south co-operation is a key factor. It is also crucial to ensure that our policies fall in line with NEPAD initiatives.'

Matibe also spoke about the role of culture in the developing world. 'Arts and culture is extremely important in sustainable development,' he said, 'and can have a great impact on the economic and social sectors, but it is not given the prominence it deserves by international donor agencies. For instance, priority is given to funding for infrastructure, education, health, but we need to push for more money to be put aside for arts and culture and for the necessary resources to be made available to producers so that our handicraft can take its rightful place in the global market at, for instance, trade fairs. This will enable our cultural industries to contribute more to South Africa's GDP and become even more effective in the fight against poverty.'

The DAC has been instrumental in the adoption of the Convention, and, said Matibe, it will continue to lead the way in terms of coming up with recommendations and strategies for compliance with the Convention, and then ensuring implementation within the SADC region. 'I think we understand the implications and the processes better than many other countries. Hosting this conference is also a clear message of our intent.'

But how will the craft producer in rural Venda or Mpumalanga be made aware of these developments and the new opportunities that await him or her? 'We will make use of our existing national strategies,' said Matibe, 'such as the DAC's Investing in Culture programme or the MAPP-SETA initiative. National radio and the press will help to raise awareness, and our co-ordinators in the provinces will also educate the people. If necessary, we will establish new structures, working with the South African National Commission for UNESCO.'

The Africa and Diaspora Conference on Cultural Diversity for Social Cohesion and Sustainable Development, and all the developments that will arise from it, augurs well for not only the growth of SADC countries but also for the individuals who plough their energy into creating unique expressions of their artistic talents and who deserve all the recognition and opportunities they can get. **CF**



**AFRIK
&
DIASPO**

Ukwehlu

**Conference on
Cultural Diversity
for Social Cohesion
and
Sustainable Development**

**in City, South Africa
15 September 2006**



arts and culture

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Arts and Culture
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