

22ND ICOMOS GENERAL ASSEMBLY & SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM (GA2026)

Living Heritage: Respect – Enhance – Accept – Partnership

October 2026, Borneo Convention Centre, Kuching, Malaysia

CONCEPT NOTE

Session Title: Living Heritage in Africa: Safeguarding Intangible Practices

Organisers: ICOMOS Africa and Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (ICESCO)

1. Background

Africa is home to a vast and diverse range of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), encompassing oral traditions, storytelling, performing arts, social practices, rituals, festive events and traditional craftsmanship. These practices form the living heritage of African communities, sustaining cultural identities, values and collective memory across generations.

Yet, globalization, rapid urbanisation, climate change, migration and conflict increasingly threaten the continuity of these practices. Safeguarding Africa's living heritage requires innovative, inclusive and community-driven approaches that balance tradition with modern realities.

ICOMOS Africa, with its continental expertise in heritage conservation and ICESCO, with its mandate to promote education, science, and culture across its 54 member states, are uniquely positioned to collaborate on strategies for safeguarding intangible heritage in Africa.

2. Objectives

- Highlight the diversity of intangible practices across African regions, from oral traditions to craftsmanship.
- Identify challenges and opportunities for safeguarding intangible heritage in contexts of social and environmental change.

- Develop actionable recommendations for integrating intangible heritage into sustainable development, peacebuilding and community resilience.

3. Session Format

- *Opening Keynote* (20 min): Framing the importance of intangible heritage in Africa.
- *Panel Presentations* (60 min): Case studies from African countries and ICOMOS member states.
- *Interactive Dialogue* (45 min): Roundtable discussion with heritage practitioners, policymakers, and community representatives.
- *Youth Voices Segment* (20 min): Contributions from ICOMOS Emerging Professionals in Africa.
- *Closing Reflections* (15 min): Joint recommendations and next steps.

4. Expected Outcomes

- A joint ICOMOS Africa–ICOMOS statement on safeguarding intangible heritage in Africa.
- Documentation of best practices and case studies for dissemination across ICOMOS and ICOMOS networks.
- Enhanced visibility of youth and community voices in African and global heritage discourse.

5. Target Participants

- Heritage professionals and researchers from ICOMOS Africa and ICOMOS networks.
- Representatives of communities practicing intangible heritage across Africa.
- Emerging professionals.
- Policymakers and cultural institutions from the host country, Malaysia and African states.

6. Alignment with GA2026 Theme

- *Respect*: Recognizing the value of Africa's intangible heritage traditions.
- *Enhance*: Supporting innovation in safeguarding practices rooted in African contexts.

- *Accept*: Embracing diversity, intergenerational knowledge, and traditional wisdom.
- *Partnership*: Strengthening collaboration between ICOMOS Africa, ICOMOS and local communities.

7. Next Steps

- Identify speakers and case study contributors from ICOMOS Africa members and ICOMOS member states.
- Coordinate logistics with GA2026 organising committee.
- Prepare joint communication materials and outreach strategy highlighting African perspectives.