



With breaking stories and
newswire products from

UN NEWS CENTRE



UN-backed committee adds eight items to list of intangible heritage in peril



Elementary school students who know Saman a little perform on a special occasion at their school. © 2010 Centre for Research & Development of Culture, Indonesia

24 November 2011 –

Eight traditional items, from boatbuilding skills in Iran to Malian rites of wisdom to circular breathing techniques in Mongolia, were today placed on the United Nations List of Intangible Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding.

The intergovernmental committee managing the list, meeting this week in Bali, Indonesia, said all eight items were in danger of dying out or fading away. The new additions to the list join Hezhen Yimakan storytelling from China, which was inscribed yesterday.

Today's additions, announced by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in a [press release](#), include two from Iran: Naqqali dramatic storytelling and the skills of building and sailing Iranian Lenj boats.

[Naqqali](#) dramatic performance has a long history in Iranian society, from the courts to the villages, UNESCO said, with the performers often improvising as they recount stories in verse or prose accompanied gestures and movements, and sometimes also by music and painted scrolls.

[Lenj vessels](#), known as Lenjes, are usually hand-built from wood and used by inhabitants of the northern coast of the Persian Gulf for sea journeys, trading, fishing and pearl diving, UNESCO reported. But they are increasingly replaced by cheaper fiberglass substitutes and the philosophy, culture and traditional knowledge of the Lenjes is fading.

Also inscribed on the endangered list is [Yaokwa](#), the ritual of the Enawene Nawe people – who live in the southern Amazon rainforest of Brazil – for the maintenance of social and cosmic order. Different clans assume responsibility for different parts of the ritual, which is performed each day during the protracted dry season to honour the spirits.

Indonesia's [saman dance](#) was also recognized on the list. Performed by boys and young men among the Gayo people of the country's Aceh province, saman is a dance used to celebrate important holidays and cement relationships between villages. Performers sit on their heels or kneel in tight rows and then clap their hands, slap their chests, thighs and the ground, click their fingers and sway and twist in time to the music.

In Mongolia, there is cause for concern about the performance techniques of [Limbe](#) practitioners, which has also been added to the list. The Limbe is a side-blown flute made of hardwood or bamboo and used to perform Mongolian folk "long songs." Performers use circular breathing techniques so they can produce the continuous, wide-ranging melodies that are typical of the long songs, but now there are only 14 practitioners remaining.

Three other items were added to the list. They include the secret society of the [Koredugaw](#), a rite of wisdom among the Bambara, Malinke, Senoufo and Samogo peoples of Mali that is performed at festivals and other important occasions. The society aims to educate, train and prepare children to cope with life and deal with social problems, and initiates to the society are encouraged to provoke laughter with behaviour marked by gluttony, caustic humour and wit.

In neighbouring Mauritania, the Moorish epic known as [T'heydinn](#) – which comprises dozens of poems in the Hassaniya language about the feats of Moorish emirs and sultans – was also added. The poems, passed down from fathers to sons, are sung by griots and accompanied by stringed instruments such as the lute, harp and kettledrum.

The other item inscribed today is [Xoan singing](#), which is practiced in Phu Tho province of Viet Nam during the first two months of the lunar year. Guilds of Xoan singers have traditionally

performed in sacred spaces such as temples, shrines and communal houses for the spring festivals.

The 24-member committee, created under a convention that was adopted by UNESCO in 2003, continues its work until next Tuesday.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[Chinese storytelling tradition placed on UN list of intangible heritage in danger](#)