Samoa talks culture

"Some of the cultural traditions and skills requiring revival, strengthening and sustaining highlighted by the enthusiastic participants included: the art of navigation; the art of building a fale Samoa; that of building canoes; the rekindling of the oral history of Samoa; the art of composing song and rhymes; weaving and carving; social customs and behavior; tattooing; siapo and elei making..."

Tasked with a mission to protect and uphold Samoa's intangible heritage, the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture, in partnership with UNESCO, hosted the second round of public consultations on the "Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention 2003" in Savai'i and Upolu this week.

According to the UNESCO Convention 2003, The "intangible cultural heritage" means "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity."

Efforts by several nations prior to the convention brought the UNESCO at the apex of such an important initiative towards sustaining the fading arts and skills of traditional cultures.

Samoa follows suit with other Pacific Islands as the need to keep up with the ever advancing civilization also presses for each and every cultural community to embrace their identities which are carved in all of their cultural traditions and spaces.

Nearly two hundred participants, consisting of village representatives/ sui o nu'u of both Savai'i and Upolu,
contributed to the intense discussions pertaining to the relevance and importance of the UNESCO 2003 Convention for Samoa.

The consultations were implemented as a result of a workshop held earlier this year on the endorsement of the convention.

Minster of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC), MageleMauiliuMagele, spoke of the tidal wave of changes that we are facing as a small nation with a unique but dynamic and living culture.

Being alert to the incoming changes and taking charge of our traditional customs, skills and spaces, with an open, patient and wise mind was the gist of the Minister's keynote address.

The Minister also acknowledged the assistance from UNESCO Apia office and commended the all-local members of the ICH working group who facilitated the consultations.

A remarkable response from the unified participants indicated the overall concern of Samoans about their traditional knowledge and crafts.

It was unanimously agreed among the participants from Savai'i and Upolu that the protecting and upholding of our cultural heritage are explicitly required now.

Some of the cultural traditions and skills requiring revival, strengthening and sustaining highlighted by the enthusiastic participants included: the art of navigation; the art of building afae Samoa; that of building canoes; the rekindling of the oral history of Samoa; the art of composing song and rhymes; weaving and carving; social customs and behavior; tattooing; siapo and elei making; etc.

While MESC is the key agency for Culture in Samoa, other government agencies such as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, (MNRE) Samoa Tourism Authority (STA), Ministry of Women and some NGOs, are also tasked to safeguard our intangible cultural heritage and reasonably so.

The Culture Division of the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture is composed of the units - Culture Awareness, Archives, Audio Visual and Museum of Samoa. In a matter of weeks, the team will be showcasing cultural workshops at the Museum of Samoa where some of the skills and traditional knowledge mentioned will be the highlights of these workshops.

The participants, representing the people of Samoa's united voice, confirmed the need to ratify the 2003 UNESCO Convention. It is now up to the Ministry of Education Sports and Culture to carry amongst other important initiatives the challenge of achieving such a vital purpose for Samoa.