

IOV World General Assembly and the IOV Sharjah Scientific Conference

Sharjah, 1-4 April

The World General Assembly (WGA) of the International Organization of Folk Art (IOV), and the Scientific Conference: “*Folk Culture: Present and Future Pathways*”, organized in collaboration with the Sharjah Institute for Heritage (SIH), were held from the 1st to the 4th of April 2019. They took place in the sumptuous Cultural Palace of Sharjah, under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Muhammed Al Qasimi.

This important meeting was held in conjunction with the Sharjah Heritage Days festival, an international event organized annually by the Sharjah Institute for Heritage. Countless folk groups from all over the world attended the festival, contributing to the great pomp of colors, folk music, dances and performances.

The WGA set new plans and objectives, developed the IOV’s internal structures and its mission for the near future. Both Executive Board members and members of the organization expressed their appreciation and support of the exceptional leadership of IOV President Ali Khalifa, which had a positive impact on the IOV both culturally and financially. They also extended their gratitude to the Secretary General of the organization, Fabrizio Cattaneo, and the head of the Scientific Committee Professor Dr. Mohamed Al Nouri for their wonderful organization of the General Assembly and the Scientific Conference.

Many members of various national and continental sections took part in the General Assembly, such as India, Brazil, China, Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, Bangladesh, Nepal, Senegal, Canada, Australia, the United States, Italy, France, Spain, Georgia, Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Russia, and Austria, to name a few.

The scientific conference, which was rich in content and debate, explored the changes folk culture and folk art are undergoing around the world due to globalization and modernization.

In particular, great attention was given to the themes of cultural heritage and its relationship with digital technologies and platforms and the way in which this relationship is changing the cultural representation of communities and the use of cultural references.

Many of the interventions insisted on the need to have a more inclusive and participatory approach to the heritagization processes, allowing those safeguarding heritage to play a role in the implementation of conservational strategies. The main concept of the debate was about the value of cultural goods, in agreement with the UNESCO framework and the Faro Convention on the value of cultural heritage for the communities.

The Vice President Emma Chen on behalf of the government of Zhong County, Chongqing, China submitted an application to the General Assembly for the venue city of the 2020 Global Assembly. And at the conference, an eight-minute introduction video to Zhong County was broadcast. The county government will give full support to the GA.

The GA included many moving moments. Such as the commemoration of Marcel Oelbrandt, the recently deceased IOV Secretary General who played a major role in setting the goals and helping move forward the IOV 2020 vision. Another moving moment was honoring the memory of the founder of the IOV, Alexander Veigl.

The Executive Committee present the recently published book which commemorates the work Veigl had done for the IOV over the course of 40 years and showcases the history of the organization's activity around the world. Ms. Anna Veigl, wife of the founder, contributed with memories and films of Alexander. Ms. Veigl is also organizing the book launch in Europe, which will take place in Austria in May 2019.

Another important part of the General Assembly week was the presentation of a special award to His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan Bin Muhammed Al Qasimi, the sovereign ruler of the Emirate of Sharjah, who is an important supporter of the IOV.

The IOV General Assembly and its President awarded him The International Necklace to serve Folk Culture in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the field of folk culture in the Gulf region, his efforts to establish the Sharjah Heritage Institute, his support for international and local heritage organizations and the creation of many cultural centers in the Arab countries.

This award celebrates world leaders, great thinkers and artists distinguished in their support of folk culture. It was only presented twice in the history of IOV World: to the President of Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba, and to the President of the Republic of Austria, Kurt Waldheim. The ceremony was

held at the highest level of organization, with many foreign dignitary's present, such as North African and Middle Eastern ambassadors and consuls.

The award consisted of a handmade medal in 18-Karat gold, weighing 150 grams, with a length of 150 cm, containing the IOV logo, designed by Dr. Masooma Ali Al Mutawah.

The funds for the award along with its corresponding booklet were donated independently by the IOV president.