Self-Declaration on Cultural Rights Interpretation and Practice

I, _____, submit this self-declaration as a condition of joining the Global Universities Alliance for Cultural Rights. By signing, I agree, share, and commit to the definition of cultural rights referenced in the Alliance Cooperation Agreement (Annex A) and the United Nations Cultural Rights Booklet (Annex B), and to ensure it is applied consistently in my work and daily conduct.

I commit to the UN definition of cultural rights, which states that "Cultural rights protect the development and expression of cultural identities. At their core, they empower individuals and groups to express their humanity, worldviews and the meanings they attribute to their existence and development through various forms of human expressions […] Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Therefore, the same common principles of universality, inalienability, interdependence and indivisibility, as well as non-discrimination and equality, apply to them".

I agree with the affirmation that all cultures should be viewed as equal in dignity and deserving equal respect, while recognizing that all cultural practices are subject to international human rights standards.

I also acknowledge that no one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope (UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, art. 4) and that human rights practice must prevent the imposing of culturally dominant ideologies on communities.

I commit to translating this understanding into daily practice across teaching, research, partnerships, communication, and any other activity. Where my conduct connected to the Alliance contradicts this declaration, I will take reasonable steps to correct it, remedy harm, and prevent recurrence.

By signing, I confirm that I have read this declaration carefully and that I accept it as a standard that binds my participation in the Alliance and guides my work and conduct beyond it.

Name and Surname: _____

Place and date: _____

Signature: _____

Annex A

Global Universities Alliance for Cultural Rights Cooperation Agreement

Global Universities Alliance for Cultural Rights

A cooperation network among universities

Preamble

Whereas the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms that "everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits" (UDHR, art. 27), and whereas cultural rights are further elaborated in binding and guiding instruments, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, art. 15), the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, art. 27, rights of persons belonging to minorities), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, art. 31), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD, art. 30).

Recalling relevant UNESCO and international standards that safeguard culture and cultural participation, including the 1970 Convention on illicit trade in cultural property, the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions; as well as the 1954 Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property in armed conflict, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007; e.g., arts. 11, 13, 31), and regional instruments such as the Council of Europe Faro Convention (2005) on the value of cultural heritage for society.

Consistent with the global conversation catalysed by 2025 MONDIACULT and UNESCO's Global Report on Cultural Policies "*Culture: the Missing SDG*", the Cooperation Agreement places culture at the core of the post-2030 agenda, drawing on consolidated evidence that culture advances rights, education, resilience, climate action, and digital transformation, and substantiates the case for a standalone culture goal in future development frameworks.

Affirming that cultural rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated with other human rights, including freedom of expression and association, education, scientific freedom and academic freedom; and recognising their essential contribution to human dignity, social cohesion, peacebuilding and sustainable development (notably SDGs 4.7, 8.9, 11.4, 12.b).

Mindful that these rights are today challenged by armed conflict and forced displacement, climate and environmental crises, language and knowledge loss, illicit trafficking and commodification, censorship and the shrinking of civic space, cultural appropriation, as well as digital transformation dynamics – including data extractivism, algorithmic bias, enclosure of knowledge, and the erasure or misappropriation of cultural expressions online.

Recognising the public mission of universities to advance knowledge, foster critical inquiry, and serve society; their capacity to connect research, education, innovation and community engagement; and their responsibility to co-create solutions with culture-bearers, Indigenous Peoples, local communities, artists, heritage professionals, youth and policymakers – guided by Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), equity, and do-no-harm ethics.

Convinced that a global, open, and practice-oriented alliance of universities active in cultural rights is urgently needed to: (i) consolidate evidence and good practice on cultural rights; (ii) build capacities and curricula; (iii) protect and enable culture-bearers and at-risk scholars; (iv) develop fair, inclusive and open knowledge ecosystems; (v) inform laws and public policies; and (vi) mobilise collective action across regions and languages.

It is therefore established the Global Universities Alliance for Cultural Rights.

What is the Global Universities Alliance for Cultural Rights?

The Alliance is a voluntary network of universities and university research centres, anchored in a commitment to safeguard, promote and operationalise cultural rights worldwide through research, education, community partnerships, and policy dialogue, in solidarity with all peoples and cultures.

The Alliance is a platform for voluntary cooperation among universities and university research centres. It is an international, unincorporated, non-profit, membership-based network.

The Alliance also adopts the attached logo as its official emblem.

Purpose and Objectives

The premises detailed in the Preamble form an integral and substantial part of the Purpose of the Alliance itself. The Alliance is rooted in the ultimate objective of strengthening and informing the global debate on cultural rights by fostering international academic exchange that champions diversity, encourages thoughtful listening, and embraces the plurality of perspectives.

In particular, the Alliance aims to:

- Act as a platform of ideas. The Alliance shall create a free and safe space for the exchange of perspectives, methods, findings, and experiences on cultural rights.
- Facilitate academic research exchange and inter-university cooperation through open-access publication of research outputs and the free exchange of data, methods, and results.
- Co-produce knowledge with communities and institutions.
- Promote joint initiatives for and on cultural rights.
- Support teaching and capacity-building through shared curricula and open educational resources.
- Inform public policy through evidence-based recommendations.
- Uphold common ethical standards, including FPIC, respectful representation, fair and culturally appropriate benefit sharing, and responsible data stewardship with due protection of traditional knowledge.
- Advance inclusion, accessibility, and meaningful youth participation.

Modes of Cooperation

The Alliance exists to carry out integrated forms of scientific, educational and training collaboration, which may take place in the following ways:

- Collaboration in scientific studies and research.
- Cooperation and/or joint participation in national and/or international research programs.
- Collaboration in carrying out research and/or consultancy activities entrusted by public or private institutions.
- Joint organisation of conferences, seminars, and study meetings of national and international relevance.
- Sharing of instrumental and/or complementary resources for scientific research and teaching.
- Organisation of training courses and other educational activities.
- Other integrated forms of collaboration, as may be agreed upon by the Members.

This Agreement does not entail any obligation or financial burden for the Members.

Membership and Commitments

Membership is exclusively open to universities and university research centres actively engaged with cultural rights in research, teaching, and public engagement.
Joining is voluntary; each institution participates only in activities aligned with its mission and capacity. Nothing in this Cooperation Agreement restricts Members from initiating or participating in bilateral, multilateral, or other external activities outside the Alliance; Members are encouraged to share any relevant results with the Alliance.

Annually, all Alliance Members convene online to share research findings and set future priorities, contributing meaningfully to the worldwide debate on cultural rights.

Ethics and FPIC

The Alliance strongly believes in the importance of safeguarding community rights, ensuring voluntary and informed participation, and preventing extractive or inequitable practices. For this reason, all Alliance activities must comply with the Code of Ethics.

This includes:

- Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) for any engagement with communities or with their cultural expressions.
- Respectful representation and non-misappropriation.
- Fair and culturally appropriate benefit-sharing.
- Safeguards for data and knowledge, including traditional and sensitive materials.
- Inclusive participation and accessibility.

Communication

Members may use the Alliance name and official logo only to promote the Alliance and its approved joint projects or activities, and only in ways that impose no cost or obligation on other Members. Use for non-Alliance or individual initiatives is not permitted.

Use of the name and logo is non-exclusive, non-transferable, non-modifiable, and not for endorsement or paid promotion.

Global Universities Alliance for
CULTURAL
RIGHTS

Logo

Global Universities Alliance for
CULTURAL
RIGHTS

Annex B

United Nations Cultural Rights Booklet

Defining Cultural Rights

SPECIAL PROCEDURES
UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Cultural rights protect the development and expression of cultural identities. At their core, **they empower individuals and groups to express their humanity, worldviews and the meanings they attribute to their existence and development through various forms of human expressions.** This can include the arts, cultural heritage or languages, as well as sciences, knowledge, convictions, religions and beliefs, sports and games, rites and ceremonies, production methods, technology, institutions and livelihoods, connections with nature and the environment, food and dress, and ways of life. They also encompass the rights to access and participate in heritage and resources that facilitate these processes of identification and development.

What do cultural rights protect?

a. Scope

Cultural rights are human rights that pertain to culture, defined and understood as an inclusive concept encompassing all aspects of human existence and ways of life.

Culture as a concept is not a series of isolated manifestations or hermetic compartments. Cultures in their diversity are interactive, dynamic, and ever-changing processes, whereby individuals and communities preserve their specificities and express their identities. All cultures should be viewed as equal in dignity and deserving equal respect, but all cultural practices are subject to international human rights law.

In particular, **cultural rights protect**:

- the rights related to human creativity in all its diversity, and the conditions for it to be made accessible, exercised and developed;
- the freedom to choose, express and develop cultural identities, which include the right to be a part, or not, of particular collectives, to refer or not to specific cultural heritage, and to change such choice;
- the rights of individuals and groups to participate or not in the cultural life of their choice and to adopt and conduct, or not, their own cultural practices;
- the rights of individuals and groups to start, review, revise, adapt and cease cultural practices;
- the right to interact and exchange with others, regardless of group affiliations and frontiers;
- the right to access and enjoy cultural resources such as the arts, knowledge, including scientific knowledge, one's own cultural heritage, as well as that of others;
- the right to participate in - and possibly lead - the interpretation and development of cultural heritage, as well as in shaping and implementing policies and decisions that affect the exercise of cultural rights.

Cultural rights do not protect culture or cultural heritage per se, but the conditions allowing all people, without discrimination, to access, participate and contribute to all aspects of cultural life.

b. Key principles

Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, enshrined in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)**. Therefore, the same common principles of universality, inalienability, interdependence and indivisibility, as well as non-discrimination and equality, apply to them.

All States are bound under international law to respect, protect and fulfil cultural rights as any other human right. **States must**, in particular:

- ensure that obligations with immediate effect are implemented without delay, such as ensuring that the right to take part in cultural life is exercised without discrimination, recognizing cultural practices and refraining from interfering in their enjoyment and development;
- use the maximum of their available resources to ensure the progressive realization of cultural rights for all, and refrain from taking regressive measures;
- create mechanisms of accountability for the continued enforcement of rights.

In addition, as stressed by the **UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity**, the defense of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity, and its flourishing requires the full implementation of cultural rights (arts. 4 and 5). Cultural diversity and cultural rights are closely interrelated and interdependent.

What does international law say on cultural rights?

a. Relevant United Nations instruments and mechanisms

All rights in the UDHR have been enshrined in two main legally binding international instruments, both adopted in 1966: the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).**

Regardless of their titles, the legal basis for the protection of cultural rights is established in both Covenants, as well as in a wide range of other international instruments. **Relevant provisions** include:

- the right to take part in cultural life under article 27 of the UDHR, article 15.1. a of the ICESCR, article 5.b of the **Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD),** article 13 of the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)** and article 30 of the **Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD);**
- the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications (art. 27 of the UDHR and art. 15.1.b of the ICESCR);
- the right to the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which a person is the author (art. 27 of the UDHR and art. 15.1.c of the ICESCR);
- the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity (art. 15.3 of the ICESCR); the
- freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers; either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of one's choice, as part of the right to freedom of expression (art. 19 of the ICCPR);
- the right to education (art. 26 of the UDHR; art. 13 and 14 of the ICESCR, art. 28 and 29 of the **Convention on the Rights of the Child**);

- the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of one's choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest one's religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching, as well as the right not to be subjected to coercion in matters of religion or beliefs (art. 18 of the ICCPR);
- the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and association (art. 21 and 22 of the ICCPR);
- provisions relating to minorities (art. 27 of the ICCPR and **Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities**);
- provisions relating to indigenous peoples (**United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** and **Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries** of the International Labour Organization);
- provisions relating to migrants (art. 31, 43 and 45 of the **International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families**).

Significant efforts have been undertaken to strengthen the **implementation of cultural rights** by clarifying their normative content and specifying the nature and content of State obligations. United Nations Human Rights mechanisms have participated in this endeavour, in particular the Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (in particular through **General Comments 17, 21 and 25**) .

b. Permissible limitations on cultural rights

No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope (UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, art. 4).

It may be necessary to limit the implementation of cultural rights under certain circumstances. Such limitations must be determined by law, be compatible with the nature of the right that is limited and be strictly necessary for the promotion of general welfare in a democratic society, in accordance with article 4 of the ICESCR. Any limitations must be proportionate, meaning that the least restrictive measure must be taken when several types of limitations are possible.

The **Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** emphasized "the need to take into consideration existing international human rights standards on limitations that can or cannot be legitimately imposed on rights that are intrinsically linked to the right to take part in cultural life, such as the rights to privacy, to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, to freedom of opinion and expression, to peaceful assembly and to freedom of association" (General Comment 21, para.19). These rights are subjected to particular standards outlined in the ICCPR regarding limitations.

At the same time, human rights practice must prevent the imposing of culturally dominant ideologies on communities. Identifying cultural practices that violate or are contrary to human rights thus requires an informed, open and participatory debate especially involving those who support, carry or are affected by the cultural practices in question, including women.