

**MEDIA RELEASE**

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**KEBAYA SUCCESSFULLY INSCRIBED ONTO THE UNESCO REPRESENTATIVE LIST  
OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY**

**Singapore, 4 December 2024** – *Kebaya* has been inscribed onto the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity at the 19th session of the Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) that was held in Asunción, Republic of Paraguay. The IGC announced the successful inscription of *Kebaya: Knowledge, Skills, Traditions and Practices* on 4 December 2024 at approximately 9:47pm (UTC +08:00). The 24-member committee adopted the recommendation by the Evaluation Body to inscribe *kebaya* onto the Representative List, and this was witnessed by representatives of at least 130 States Parties and accredited non-governmental organisations to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Culture Heritage.

2 The multinational nomination of *kebaya* involved five Southeast Asian countries – Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand – marking the largest nomination from Southeast Asia to date, in terms of the number of nominating countries. The five countries collaborated on a nomination for the first time as the *kebaya* celebrates our shared cultural identity, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and continues to be present and actively produced and worn by many communities across Southeast Asia.

3 The nomination fulfilled all five evaluation criteria used by the IGC. The nominating countries were commended for the level of community participation at both the national and regional level during the nomination process, as well as the cohesion in recognising *kebaya* as a unifying element that connects diverse cultures and communities that cross geographically boundaries. With the positive recommendations from the Evaluation Body, the IGC, chaired by H.E. Ms Nancy Ovelar de Gorostiaga (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary and Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Paraguay to UNESCO), proceeded to declare *kebaya* inscribed onto the Representative List.

4 Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth & Second Minister for Law, said: “The successful inscription of *Kebaya: Knowledge, Skills, Traditions and Practices* onto the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity is a milestone to

be celebrated. It marks Singapore's first multinational nomination and is the largest for Southeast Asia to date, in terms of the number of nominating countries, involving a collaborative effort between Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. For the first time, these five nations have joined forces to recognise the *kebaya* as a symbol of our shared history and cultural identity. Besides recognising its cultural significance, its inscription on the UNESCO list is also a chance to promote cross-cultural understanding and unity in Singapore and across the region". Minister Tong also serves as Chairman of the Singapore National Commission for UNESCO.

5 Sufiyanto Amat Sopingi, founder of Kebaya Societe, said: "*Kebaya* plays two key roles in my life. The first is in my role in running the online platform of Kebaya Societe, to grow a deeper appreciation of the cultural significance of and raise awareness of the diverse types of *kebaya* with our followers. Second, as a *kebaya* maker myself, I have a great interest in understanding the thought processes that go behind each *kebaya*, which inspires me as a practitioner. I am very happy to hear the news of the successful inscription because *kebaya* is a living heritage in Southeast Asia. With the UNESCO inscription, it is further recognised on a global scale as a garment that's synonymous with our region."

6 Besides great pride, the inscription also brings along a sense of unity, shared responsibility and commitment to regional cooperation on ICH safeguarding. To celebrate this historic achievement, the five participating countries have organised a *kebaya* exhibition and fashion showcase, during the IGC. Apart from raising awareness of this shared heritage, the activities also present an opportunity for intercultural dialogue, and foster collaborative effort for the safeguarding and continued transmission of *kebaya* to future generations.

#### Continued Community Engagement throughout the Nomination Journey

7 Since the announcement of the participating countries' intention to nominate *kebaya* for the Representative List, there have been various ground-up efforts to raise awareness of *kebaya*, its socio-cultural significance and diversity, and our living heritage. Playing an instrumental role in Singapore is a local community network, *Kawan Kebaya* (Friends of Kebaya), consisting of more than 50 *kebaya* stakeholders. Beyond contributing their knowledge and views through focus group discussions and workshops during the nomination process, members of *Kawan Kebaya* have continued to be involved in the active promotion of *kebaya*. These include talks and workshops organised by *kebaya* practitioners and the

Eurasian Association, *kebaya* fashion shows by The Peranakan Association Singapore, and a *kebaya* exhibition by Kebaya Société. Ratianah Tahir, a maker and *kebaya* entrepreneur, will be launching a series of “*Kebaya by Ratianah*” dolls, as part of her contribution to this multinational effort, to engage children and youth. This project is supported by the National Heritage Board’s (NHB) *Organisation Transformation Grant*.

8 NHB has also embarked on numerous outreach initiatives to engage Singaporeans in the multinational nomination and raise awareness of *kebaya*. For instance, the *Love, Kebaya* exhibition has travelled to 10 public locations across the island since April 2023, including the National Museum of Singapore, Gardens by the Bay, Our Tampines Hub, HomeTeamNS@Khatib, OnePunggol, IMM Mall, Bugis Junction, Wisma Geylang Serai, and most recently i12 Katong, attracting more than 400,000 visitors to date. In addition, NHB launched the #WeHeartKebaya digital campaign in February 2023. The public was encouraged to share stories behind their *kebaya* through the hashtag #WeHeartKebaya, which to date, has generated over 250 entries. With this successful inscription, members of the public are welcome to continue to use the hashtag to share their love for the iconic garment. There are also plans to highlight the *kebaya* as part of *Singapore HeritageFest* in May 2025.

9 As part of youth engagement efforts, NHB has partnered Nanyang Polytechnic’s School of Design & Media to design a series of *kebaya*-themed merchandise that will be released in March 2025, via vending machines deployed at various public locations island-wide. These merchandise come in the form of keychains featuring various designs of cats clad in *kebayas*, and are created to better appeal to youth. Members of the public will be able to redeem the merchandise for free (while stocks last) while learning more about *kebaya* in the process. This youths-for-youths project aims to create buzz about the successful inscription, and to educate and increase awareness and knowledge about *kebaya* and living heritage, especially among youths.

10 For school outreach, NHB will be developing two key resources – a *kebaya* digital game for Upper Primary students and a resource kit for Lower Primary students – targeted to be launched in Q1 2025 and Q3 2025 respectively. The interactive and engaging digital game aims to educate students and pique their interest about *kebaya*. The resource kit serves as enduring education material to foster awareness about *kebaya* and the multinational nomination.

11 Sophia Hannah Tupaz, youth representative from the Eurasian Association, said: “Having worn the *kebaya* for tours and performances, it really connects me with a tradition that stretches back to more than 500 years ago, when the Portuguese first arrived in Malacca for the spice trade. Back then, the first generation of Eurasians would wear the *Cabaia Kumpridu* (long blouse). Personally, I was very happy to hear of the *kebaya* inscription because I feel that culture is so intangible and encompasses so many aspects, from traditions to identity and how it has evolved over time. I believe that it is important to have all of these recorded somewhere, to facilitate its transmission to future generations – and what better way to do that than with the UNESCO inscription?”

12 For more information, please refer to:

- [Annex A](#): List of 24 IGC Members
- [Annex B](#): Extract of the Evaluation Body’s Recommendation on *Kebaya: Knowledge, Skills, Traditions and Practices*
- [Annex C](#): Timeline of the multinational UNESCO Inscription Journey for *kebaya*
- [Annex D](#): About the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity
- [Webpage](#): Video of Minister Edwin Tong’s remarks and interviews with *kebaya* stakeholders

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### **About National Heritage Board**

The National Heritage Board (NHB) was formed on 1 August 1993. As the custodian of Singapore’s heritage, NHB is responsible for telling the Singapore story, sharing the Singaporean experience and imparting our Singapore spirit.

NHB’s mission is to preserve and celebrate the shared heritage of our diverse communities, for the purpose of education, nation-building and cultural understanding. It manages the national museums and heritage institutions, safeguards and promotes intangible cultural



heritage, and sets policies relating to heritage sites, monuments and the national collection. Through the national collection, NHB curates heritage programmes and presents exhibitions to connect the past, present and future generations of Singaporeans. NHB is a statutory board under the Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth. Please visit [www.nhb.gov.sg](http://www.nhb.gov.sg) for more information.

**LIST OF 24 INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE (IGC) MEMBERS**

1. Algeria
2. Angola
3. Bangladesh
4. Barbados
5. Burkina Faso
6. China
7. Dominican Republic
8. Ethiopia
9. France
10. Germany
11. Haiti
12. India
13. Malaysia
14. Mauritania
15. Nigeria
16. Paraguay
17. Slovakia
18. Spain
19. Uganda
20. Ukraine
21. United Arab Emirates
22. Uzbekistan
23. Vietnam
24. Zambia

**EXTRACT OF THE EVALUATION BODY'S RECOMMENDATION ON KEBAYA**

Examination of nominations for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, accessible at [https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-24-19.COM-7.b\\_EN.docx](https://ich.unesco.org/doc/src/LHE-24-19.COM-7.b_EN.docx)

**DRAFT DECISION 19.COM 7.b.26**

The Committee

1. Takes note that Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand have nominated **Kebaya: knowledge, skills, traditions and practices** (No. 02090) for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity:

Kebaya is a front-opening top often adorned with intricate embroidery and worn with fasteners such as brooches or buttons. It comes in various lengths and can be worn with a matching sarong. Kebaya is a way of dressing that has evolved with the lifestyles of Southeast Asian women. It is worn at casual as well as formal events, social gatherings and festivals. It is also worn in the performing arts, such as in dance performances, theatre and film. Contemporary designs are featured in beauty pageants and award ceremonies to reflect the wearer's cultural identity. Making kebaya involves specific skills and knowledge related to the preparation, design, selection and cutting of fabrics and accessories, as well as different sewing and embroidery styles. Traditionally, these skills and knowledge have been transmitted informally from mothers to daughters. Over time, men have also become involved and formal training has become available through schools and workshops. Kebaya is a significant part of the cultural heritage and identity of various communities in Southeast Asia. Despite variations in how kebaya is made and worn, it is a common cultural element that transcends ethnicity, religion and borders, facilitating dialogue and uniting communities.

2. Considers that, from the information included in the file, the nomination satisfies the following criteria for inscription on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity:

R.1: Kebaya is a front-opening top and a way of dressing that has evolved with the lifestyles of Southeast Asian women. The practitioners and bearers of the element include craftspeople, designers, women who wear the garment, trainees and civil society organisations. The knowledge and skills related to kebaya are transmitted informally from mothers to daughters. It is also transmitted through formal training in schools and workshops where men are involved. Over time, men have also become involved in the making and designing of the kebaya. Kebaya is a significant part of the cultural heritage and identity of various communities in Southeast Asia. It symbolises a shared heritage among submitting States as the

element transcends ethnicity, religion and borders thus facilitating dialogue and uniting communities.

- R.2: Inscription of kebaya will increase awareness of shared intangible cultural heritage across the submitting States. It is a unifying element that connects diverse cultures and communities and encourages mutual respect. Kebaya contributes to various aspects of sustainable development including quality education, gender equality, inclusive economic development and peace and social cohesion. It provides employment opportunities for individuals and small businesses, reduces poverty and encourages sustainable livelihoods. Through formal training, kebaya students gain craft skills and an in-depth understanding of kebaya's socio-cultural meanings. Various communities, groups and individuals emphasized these links to sustainable development in their letters of consent and in the video attached to the nomination file.
- R.3: The submitting States Parties have provided safeguarding measures to ensure the viability of the element through transmission, promotion, documentation and research. With the support and involvement of the communities, the States Parties will also contribute to the monitoring of the element to avoid its over-commercialization and to ensure that the beneficiaries of the safeguarding measures are kebaya stakeholders. The States also provide financial support to kebaya-related programmes such as exhibitions in museums and galleries, research and publications. Joint safeguarding measures between communities at national and international levels are highlighted in the file.
- R.4: The submitting States Parties demonstrated the participation of the communities concerned in the nomination process. Communities, groups, civil societies and individual practitioners and bearers actively participated in all stages of the process and attended meetings to share their views. They proposed safeguarding measures and drafted the nomination file. Stakeholders provided consent for the multinational nomination using letters and videos. They also provided data about the element and submitted photos and video footage in support of the nomination.
- R.5: The element is included in the national inventories of the submitting States Parties. The agencies responsible for updating and maintaining the inventories are provided. The inventories are updated regularly with extensive community involvement. The submitting States provided information about the inventory updating processes with the participation of the communities concerned.
3. Decides to inscribe **Kebaya: knowledge, skills, traditions and practices** on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity;
  4. Commends the States Parties for a well-prepared file and video that can serve as a good example for multinational files, reflecting the role of living heritage in fostering peace and mutual respect between communities, groups and individuals from different States.



***Good examples.***

The Evaluation Body is pleased to recommend some nominations from this cycle as good examples:

**i. Representative List – Overall Files**

*'Kebaya: knowledge, skills, traditions and practices'*, nominated by Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand, is a well-prepared file about an element that is connected to many domains of sustainable development. It provides a positive example for multinational files and reflects the role of living heritage in fostering peace and mutual respect between diverse communities, groups and individuals from different States.

**FACTSHEET ON THE INSCRIPTION JOURNEY**

Milestones of the UNESCO Inscription Journey of *Kebaya: Knowledge, Skills, Traditions and Practices*

| No. | Date                  | Event   |
|-----|-----------------------|---|
| 1   | First half of 2022    | Malaysia initiated meetings with Singapore and the other countries to discuss the idea of the multinational nomination of <i>kebaya</i> .   |
| 2   | August - October 2022 | <p><b>The National Heritage Board organised six focus group discussions (FGDs) with a network of stakeholders (Kawan Kebaya)</b>, to seek views and information relating to the social and cultural significance of <i>kebaya</i> to relevant communities, and views on the multinational nomination.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These FGDs were attended by cultural practitioners, representatives from cultural associations and researchers involved in the wearing and making of <i>kebaya</i>, who had all expressed their support for the multinational nomination.</li> </ul> |
| 3   | 1 - 3 November 2022   | <b>Malaysia hosted a joint workshop in Port Dickson, Malaysia</b> , where communities and state representatives from all participating states shared and proposed safeguarding measures, drafted the form and supported the nomination.   |
| 4   | 23 November 2022      | <p><b>Announcement of the multinational nomination for the inscription of <i>kebaya</i> onto the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) of Humanity.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participating countries agreed to work together on this multinational nomination as <i>kebaya</i> represents and celebrates the region's rich shared history, promotes cross-cultural understanding, and continues to be present and actively produced and worn by many communities across Southeast Asia.</li> </ul>   |
| 5   | February 2023         | <p><b>Indonesia hosts joint workshop which all participating countries took part in.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During a joint workshop hosted by Indonesia in Jakarta from 6 - 8 February 2023, communities and state representatives from all participating countries discussed the revised nomination form and provided additional information to the nomination file.</li> </ul>  |
| 6   | March 2023            | <b>Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and</b>  |

|   |                       |  |
|---|-----------------------|--|
|   |                       | <p><b>Thailand submitted the nomination files to UNESCO for evaluation and decision on the inscription.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• End March 2023: The nomination file was submitted to the secretariat of the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of ICH.</li> </ul>   |
| 7 | March 2023 - end 2024 | <p><b>Evaluation by UNESCO</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Following the submission of the nomination documents to UNESCO, the UNESCO Secretariat processed the documents and invited the participating countries to submit any additional information.</li> <li>• Thereafter, the documents were assessed by the 12-member Evaluation Body (EB), a panel of experts appointed by the 24-member Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) for the Safeguarding of the ICH. The EB put forth their recommendations to the IGC, which comprises representatives from different countries which are States Parties to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the ICH.</li> <li>• The UNESCO IGC deliberated on whether to endorse the recommendations of the EB during its annual meeting and announce the result of all nominations of submitting states.</li> <li>• The process took place over a period of about one year and nine months from the submission of the documents.</li> </ul> |
| 8 | 4 November 2024       | <p>The Evaluation Body <b>recommended <i>Kebaya: Knowledge, Skills, Traditions and Practices</i> for inscription.</b></p>  |
| 9 | 4 December 2024       | <p><b>The IGC announced the successful inscription of <i>Kebaya: Knowledge, Skills, Traditions and Practices</i> onto the Representative List</b> on 4 December 2024 at approximately 9:47pm (UTC +08:00).</p>   |

## **ABOUT THE UNESCO REPRESENTATIVE LIST OF THE INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF HUMANITY**

The UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity comprises the diverse cultural practices and expressions of humanity, and seeks to raise awareness of the importance of such practices and expressions, encourage dialogue that respects cultural diversity, as well as give due recognition to the practices and expressions of communities worldwide.

The successful listing of an element on UNESCO's Representative List by a country does not imply that this element belongs to, originates from, or exists only in the submitting country. Since the Representative List was developed in 2008, a total of 611 intangible cultural heritage elements have been inscribed as of December 2023.

Some of the intangible cultural heritage elements on UNESCO's Representative List include Hawker culture in Singapore, community dining and culinary practices in a multicultural urban context (2020), Timber rafting (a joint nomination by Austria, Czechia, Germany, Latvia, Poland and Spain; 2022), Alheda'a, oral traditions of calling camel flocks (a joint nomination by Saudi Arabia, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates; 2022), and Rotterdam Summer Carnival (a single-state nomination by The Netherlands; 2023).