«Questions by the Special Rapporter on the field of Cultural Rights».

Response by Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth of Cyprus, June 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic had a sudden and substantial impact on the creative and cultural sectors. The global health crisis and the uncertainly resulting from it profoundly affected organisations' operations as well as individuals (both employed and independent) across the sector. By March 2020, the Government of the Republic of Cyprus has taken precautionary measures in order to prevent the spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 which included certain business operations being temporarily suspended such as cinemas, theatres, libraries, museums, archaeological sites most cultural institutions resulting to exhibitions, events and performances cancelled or postponed.

In light of the situation supportive measures were adopted by the Cyprus Government geared towards financially supporting the sectors of the economy that were gravely affected (including the creative and cultural sector):

a) Suspended Operations Plan: To all businesses that have decided to suspend their operations and to all businesses that will continue their operations and will suffer losses beyond 25% of their turnover, a Suspended Operations Plan of the businesses was applied aiming at avoiding redundancies and at the same time the affected workers would receive unemployment allowance for as long as the business would be under suspended operations.

b) Support Plan for Small Businesses, for businesses employing up to 5 people, under the condition that they keep employing their employees and have suffered a loss bigger than 25% of their turnover. The Plan foresees a subsidy of 70% of the workers’ salary.

c) The obligation to pay bank instalments, including interest on credit facilities granted and / or purchased and / or managed by financial institutions, was suspended for all beneficiaries until the end of the year.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth immediately responded to the current situation by providing the financial resources and support to artists and institutions affected by cancellations of events and activities.

Current cultural programmes were readjusted in order to facilitate the cultural sector with its financial challenges that focused on offering: (a) more flexibility and adjustments regarding funding expenditure, administration and reporting, (b) funding for online presentation of an already approved activity, (c) partial prepayment of planned activities which will be implemented until the first semester of 2021, (d) proportional compensation to approved beneficiaries who had already committed to participate in events locally and abroad or made arrangements for the organization of events/activities, (e) more flexibility on formal requirements of granting programmes for film production that were already granted Government funding) as well as granting of a percentage of the total amount of confirmed losses due to the halt of film production.

With the scope of sustaining their viability and safeguarding continuity in offering cultural programmes to the public, the Ministry continued to provide financial and institutional support for the operation of cultural centres, theatres, libraries and museums.

New measures were also set in motion with an emergency grant of an amount of €900 towards professionals of the art and cultural sector. In an effort to activate creativity during the lockdown as well as support the work of local cultural actors, schemes promoting online film and audiovisual activity in short films, documentaries and animation, enhancing the screening of European and Cypriot film productions, as well as increasing the funds for the purchase of works of art for the State Collection were also adopted.

Recognising the fundamental role of the cultural sector in sustainable development, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth reached out to the cultural community and opened up a continuous line of communication in order to address the pressing issues of the impacted community as well as ensure that all relevant parties would collaborate for building a more sustainable creative and cultural sector in the future that will continue to safeguard on the one hand, access and participation to culture as well as provide the resources and infrastructure to artists and cultural institutions to stimulate creation and promote cultural activities.