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INDIA'S FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS



Mandisa Zwane, National Project Officer at UNESCO, lighting a candle while Indian High Commissioner H.E. Ram Prasad looks on. (Courtesy pics)



Representatives from the Indian High Commission and UNESCO after the lighting of candles in celebration of the Deepavali Festival.

DEEPAVALI INSCRIBED ON UNESCO'S HERITAGE LIST

BY NELISWA SIBIYA

MBABANE – In a show of unity and promotion of cultures, UNESCO has added Deepavali into their list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Deepavali is India's beloved Festival of Lights, which has achieved a significant global honour, being officially inscribed on United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's (UNESCO) most Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

The landmark decision was announced during the 20th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, which is currently still ongoing at the historic Red Fort in New Delhi.

This inscription marks Deepavali as the 16th Indian tradition to join UNESCO's prestigious global inventory. It stands proudly alongside celebrated practices such as yoga, Vedic chanting, Ramlila the Durga Puja of Kolkata, the Garba dance of Gujarat and the Kumbh Mela, reinforcing India's rich cultural legacy on the world stage.

UNESCO's evaluation process is notoriously rigorous, focusing intently on the tradition's authenticity, the effectiveness of its safeguarding measures and the depth of community participation.



Some of the Indian nationals during the celebration of Deepavali in India.

Deepavali's successful nomination underscores its universal values of hope, renewal and unity, as well as its vital role in fostering strong community bonds. This is achieved through time-honoured rituals, heartfelt prayers, spectacular fireworks and the ceremonial sharing of sweets. Celebrated enthusiastically across India and in numerous countries worldwide, the festival remains a powerful symbol of the triumph of light over darkness and good over evil.

To commemorate this momentous milestone, a special event was organised at the High Commission of India. The Chancery was beautifully adorned with festive lights, setting a vibrant scene for the celebration. To signify the essential spirit of Deepavali, the victory of good over evil and light over darkness, a lamp was ceremoniously lit. High Commissioner H.E. Ram Prasad led the lighting ceremony alongside UNESCO National Project Officer Mandisa Zwane, Sithabile Mlipha, Dr Bethusile Mahlalela, Dr Swapnika from the Indian Diaspora.

Spiritual

Expressing her delight at the news, Zwane conveyed her wishes to India on the inscription of Deepavali. The high commissioner then spoke passionately about the various ways the Deepavali Festival is celebrated in different parts of the country, highlighting the regional diversity of the observance.

The event also featured a short film about Deepavali, offering attendees a visual journey into the festival's deep cultural and spiritual significance.

With this formal recognition, India now shoulders the responsibility of promoting Deepavali traditions with care. This includes ensuring they are championed in ways that respect cultural diversity, protected from over-commercialisation and vigilantly passed on to future generations. The inscription solidifies Deepavali's place, not just as an Indian festival but as a truly intangible global heritage, inviting the world to recognise and cherish its profound message.