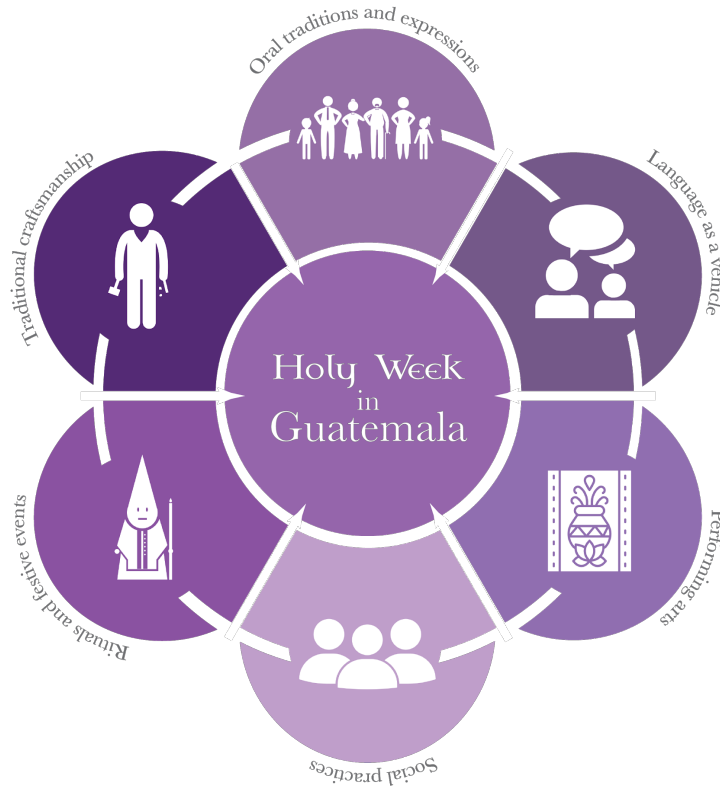


## National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage

### *Holy Week in Guatemala*

#### 1. Identification of the intangible cultural heritage element: domains



##### 1.1. Name of the element that is used in the communities concerned

Holy Week in Guatemala. Major Week can be used.

##### 1.2. Brief illustrative title and description of the element

The Holy Week or Major Week is a cultural and religious festival, highly developed in the 22 departments that make up the Republic of Guatemala. Its purpose, from a religious point of view, is to commemorate the mysteries of redemption -passion, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth-. Given its components of religious syncretism is also conducive to worship the mysteries of death and grief, finding multiple representations of the Mayan, Afro-descendant and Garifuna worldviews.

In order to carry out this cultural manifestation -which is experienced through the five senses- a diversity of private and collective expressions are carried out: processions, vigils, orchards, carpets, theatrical representations of the Passion of Christ, concerts of sacred music -funeral marches, which are considered a musical genre of its own-; diverse types of devotionals, such as the *Viacrucis*, *Vialucis*, and the Seven Fridays prayer. In this sense, the Holy Week as intangible heritage, in accordance with article 2.2 of the Convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage, is framed

in the following areas: oral traditions and expressions, performing arts; social uses, rituals and festive events; traditional craftsmanship.

The Holy Week, as a social phenomenon, has also given rise to diverse gastronomic creations shared in different regions of the country; some are very specific to each community and that, naturally, propitiate another series of unique rituals in the sharing of food. All the cultural and religious manifestations that make up the Holy Week in Guatemala are built from the community, making use of the applied arts, crafts, oral tradition, literature, gastronomy, nature; that is why, it is properly affirmed that the Holy Week in Guatemala is experienced through the five senses.

### **1.3. Historical background**

The symbol is a structural part of the collective unconscious, and as such, Jung tells us about it: "We call symbol a term, a name or an image that can be known in daily life, though it possesses specific connotations besides its ordinary and obvious meaning" (Jung, 1984). It is this ability to transmit the capacity of astonishment, to seek an explanation to the realities that surround it and to codify it through symbols that allowed the encounter of humanity with a worldview, magical thinking that derived, in the majority of cases, in perfectly structured cults that became a living fact of the culture of peoples. These cults were defining the social life of the human groups to which this system of beliefs was common, being transmitted from generation to generation through orality, first, and then through the writing of sacred books, once their theological system was already consolidated.

It is important to make this reference since it was precisely the clash between two religions with different theological systems -but that shared common elements: sacred books, external faith cults, deities that became men to die and resurrect (Sam, 2004), among others- that allowed the syncretism that would last throughout the centuries, from the Conquest to the present. The result of this syncretism, fully rooted in the culture of all communities in Guatemala, is its Holy Week, which as the festival that encompasses the largest number of participants in its various manifestations, is its supreme representation.

The religion, but specifically the popular religiosity has been one of the greatest vehicles of the culture and social cohesion -even though it is not alien to its contradictions, inherent to all human action-. In this sense, the Holy Week in Guatemala is one of the most complex and diverse social phenomena in the country, and it is, without a doubt, the religious and cultural celebration with the largest and most heterogeneous number of participants. It brings together all the economic, social, cultural and political elements of the country and dynamizes them, creating a unique festivity, full of elements that can only be experienced through the five senses, it is a profusion of art placed in function to the celebration of the pain, death and resurrection of Christ.

In Guatemala, the beginnings of this manifestation date back to the XVI century. The epicenter of this manifestation was the city of Santiago de Guatemala -today La Antigua Guatemala-, where the Christian faith merged with pre-Hispanic customs giving origin to new expressions of religious art, music, gastronomy and rites, thus achieving that this manifestation spread to the different towns of the Guatemalan region. After the earthquakes of 1773 that caused the transfer of the city of Santiago de Guatemala to La Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción in 1776, social dynamics were generated that turned these two cities into a model to follow for other regions of the country, where each community group imbued it with its own characteristics, forging the identity of Guatemalans around a manifestation of faith that promotes tolerance, respect and social cohesion in the territories where it is developed.

#### **1.4. Communities: bearers of culture**

The Holy Week is a national interest event. In this sense, there are several sectors that integrate the civil society of the Republic of Guatemala that have expressed their desire for the Holy Week to be included in the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. These sectors are: catholic church; brotherhoods, confraternities and associations of Passion; cultural organizations that are dedicated to promote the Holy Week throughout the year inside and outside the country; craftsmen and artisans; bands of sacred music; female devout porters and cucuruchos; organized neighbors and in a personal capacity; merchants; and others.

#### **1.5. Geographical distribution and frequency of manifestation of the element**

The Holy Week celebrations are present in the 22 departments that make up the Republic of Guatemala, taking the role of radiating centers of the tradition the departmental capitals; of special mention are La Nueva Guatemala de la Asunción - capital of the country-, La Antigua Guatemala and Quetzaltenango, whose cultural influence is noticeable in these manifestations. The time frame of this celebration is directly related to the celebration of the Easter Triduum -the most important celebration within Catholic Christianity- which is celebrated on the first full moon after the spring equinox in the northern hemisphere, making it a movable feast that can take place from March 21th to April 25th inclusive.

#### **1.6. Inherent cultural spaces**

Temples, small squares, parks, avenues and streets throughout the country change their daily life and become the main stage for the celebration of Holy Week in Guatemala. They bloom, along with nature and are renewed, they take on new shades with each Lenten activity. The transitions from the penitential purple to the jubilant white of the resurrection are impressive - not without first going through the drama of Calvary and its red for the divine martyr and then giving way to rigorous mourning. In this sense, the participants of the Holy Week rituals are appropriating the public space, making it a meeting point, a place of coexistence and filling it with meanings -especially the central squares of the urban centers throughout the country, which in themselves have a social, cultural and political symbolic charge in the life of Guatemalans-: "Public space, when used to communicate, transmits symbols that, at the same time, are shared and contribute to differentiate the uses made of the place to create rootedness with it" (Páramo and Burbano, 2014). Nature also manifests itself in the public space (whether rural or urban), completely changing its appearance and preparing participants to retake their daily spaces and make them an extension of the sacred space.

#### **1.7. Viability**

The Holy Week is not only circumscribed to the time of Lent and to the culminating week of the celebration, that is, the Major Week. It is during the whole year that its organizational and worship activities are registered. Since the month of May, preparations for the following year begin: planning, registration of porters, fundraising, commissioning work to artisans and artists of the different areas involved, that is, it is a cultural element that remains in constant movement throughout the year, generating expectations, as well as engaging all those involved, both with cultural activities and devotion as well as boosting the economy of all sectors.

The Holy Week is kept alive despite pandemics, earthquakes and social conflicts, proof of this are the alternative activities that were developed with the closure of the country after the pandemic by COVID-19 during the years 2020 and 2021. Its practice continued modifying activities according to the restrictions provided by the Ministry of Public Health and Social Assistance.

State authorities are also the ones who promote the celebration through oral, written and digital communications, placing value on the manifestation and its tradition as an element of identity; academic publications and exhibitions are a reference to make the Holy Week of Guatemala known to the world.

### **1.8. Intergenerational Transmission – Constant Recreation**

The Major Week, a social phenomenon of long duration, since it is a cultural and faith manifestation that has been present - with their own dynamics, that also assure its continuity - for five centuries. This denotes that it is a community process whose characteristic, besides the strong syncretic element, is the easy generational transmission and the constant recreation of all its elements, since during the whole year it is present in the collective imaginary. Every Friday of the year, activities around the popular devotion to the Passion of Christ can be appreciated, increasing during Lent -a strong time for all culture bearers and practitioners-.

In this sense, its forms of transmission are in fact present in the daily life of the country's communities: oral tradition; generational transmission through doing, seeing, listening, imitating and finally consolidating the practice of the tradition -it is important to emphasize that this transmission is two-way: ancestors to new generations and vice versa-. The radio, the written media, the internet and the social networks -media that have taken certain relevance during the pandemic by COVID-19, since most of the worship and cultural activities related to the Holy Week have been accessible to the culture bearers and practitioners through these media, the brotherhoods have made a great effort for keeping the popular devotions alive in the population in general, by means of the virtuality-. However, as already noted, generational contact is the bridge through which this tradition, fundamental in the imaginary of a large part of the population, has passed over the centuries.

This intergenerational dialogue also makes it possible to build bridges of dialogue with those members of the population who are not akin to these devotional practices; thus making possible harmony and finding new ways to carry out all the activities of Holy Week without having a negative impact on society.



Penitent children. Efrain Peralta, 2018



Palm Sunday Procession. Santuario Arquidiocesano del Señor San José, 2017



Tzijolaj. Santuario Arquidiocesano del Señor San José, 2017

### **1.9. Ministerial Agreement 560-2008**

MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS  
**MINISTERIAL AGREEMENT NUMBER 560-2008**  
Guatemala, September 4, 2008.  
**THE MINISTER OF CULTURE AND SPORTS**

#### **WHEREAS:**

That it is a fundamental obligation of the State to protect, encourage, and disclose the national culture; to issue laws and provisions and tend to its enrichment as well as to recognize the right that persons and communities have to their cultural identity according to their values and traditions.

#### **WHEREAS:**

That the Licentiate Felipe Aguilar Marroquín, General Manager/CEO of the entity Punto 3, Sociedad Anónima, files the project CONTEMPLATIONS - History, Art and Culture of the Guatemalan Holy Week-; and in the exercise of its right of petition, requests to the Ministry of Culture and Sports, to declare Holy Week in Guatemala as Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Nation, for constituting a fervent tradition of several centuries; and



because it involves a spiritual, cultural and social participation that Guatemalans live, as a religious and anthropological activity.

**WHEREAS:**

That after the research and favorable opinions of the Institute of Anthropology and History, the Department of Anthropological, Archaeological and Historical Research, the Registry of Cultural Property and the Sub-directorate of Intangible Cultural Heritage, all of the General Directorate of Cultural and Natural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture and Sports, this disposition is hereby issued.

**THEREFORE:**

Based on what was considered and with legal grounds in articles 57, 59, 65, and 194, paragraphs a) and f) of the Political Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala; 27, paragraphs m) and 31, paragraph b) of Agreement Number 114-97 of Congress of the Republic of Guatemala, Law of the Executive Body; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 25, and 26 of Agreement Number 26-97 of Congress of the Republic of Guatemala, Law for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of the Nation.

**AGREES:**

**ARTICLE 1.** To declare Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Nation, the Holy Week in Guatemala; for constituting an annual tradition of religious fervor and spiritual recollection dating back several centuries, as a sign of national identity.

**ARTICLE 2.** The Registry of Cultural Property of the General Directorate for Cultural and Natural Heritage of this Ministry shall make the corresponding inscription.

**ARTICLE 3.** This Agreement shall take effect the day it is published in the newspaper Diario de Centro América.

**LET IT BE KNOWN**

[Signature: illegible]

*Mario Calo Morente*

[Seal:] Directorate of Legal Affairs  
Ministry of Culture and Sports

[Signature: illegible]

*Jerónimo Lancerio Chingo*

[Seal:] MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS

[Circular seal:]

LEGAL CONSULTANCY  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS

[Circular seal:]

MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS  
SUPERIOR OFFICE

**1.10. Ministerial Agreement 362-2011**

**MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS**

## **MINISTERIAL AGREEMENT NUMBER 362-2011**

Guatemala, April 12, 2011.

### **THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS**

#### **WHEREAS:**

That it is a fundamental obligation of the State to protect, encourage, and disclose the national culture; to issue laws and provisions that tend to its enrichment as well as to recognize the right that persons and communities have to their cultural identity according to their values and traditions.

#### **WHEREAS:**

That in accordance with the Technical Opinion related to the Processional Funeral Marches of Holy Week, number DIAAeH-026-2011, dated April 07, two thousand eleven, issued by the Department of Anthropological, Archaeological and Historical Investigations, of the Technical Directorate of Investigations and Registration; Opinion number 016 dated April 7, two thousand eleven, issued by the Technical Directorate of the Institute of Anthropology and History, both of the General Directorate of Cultural and Natural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture and Sports, by which they ruled appropriate the Declaration of the Guatemalan Funeral Marches, as Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Nation.

#### **THEREFORE:**

In the exercise of the functions conferred upon it by articles 57, 58, 59, 65, and 194, paragraphs a) and f) of the Political Constitution of the Republic of Guatemala; 27, paragraphs a), f), and m), and; 31, paragraph b) of Agreement Number 114-97 of Congress of the Republic of Guatemala, Law of the Executive Body; 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 25, and 26 of Agreement Number 26-97 of the Congress of the Republic of Guatemala, Law for the Safeguarding of the Cultural Heritage of the Nation; 7 of the Governmental Agreement Number 27-2008 dated January 10, 2008, Internal Organic Regulations of the Ministry of Culture and Sports.

#### **AGREES:**

**ARTICLE 1.** To declare Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Nation, the **GUATEMALAN FUNERAL MARCHES**; for being part of the musical traditions of the HOLY WEEK; since the funeral marches give a solemn touch to the passage of the processions; and as musical iconography contributes to the strengthening of religious devotion.

**ARTICLE 2.** The Registry of Cultural Property of the Directorate for Cultural and Natural Heritage of this Ministry shall make the corresponding inscription.

**ARTICLE 3.** The Technical Directorate of the Institute of Anthropology and History of the General Directorate of the Cultural and Natural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture and Sports shall issue the safeguarding, defense, research, and conservation of the Guatemalan Funeral Marches.



**ARTICLE 4.** This Ministerial Agreement shall take effect the day it is published in the newspaper Diario de Centro América.

### LET IT BE KNOWN

[Signature: illegible]  
*Atenógenes Dubón García*  
*Escobedo Ayala*  
[Seal:] DIRECTOR OF LEGAL AFFAIRS  
Sports  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS

[Signature: illegible]  
*Héctor Leonel*  
[Seal:] Ministry of Culture and Sports

[Circular seal:]  
DIRECTORATE OF LEGAL AFFAIRS  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS

[Circular seal:]  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND SPORTS  
MINISTERIAL OFFICE

### 1.11. Glossary

**Altar maker:** Artist who is dedicated to develop allegories of the life of Christ and his passion in a didactic way, with a variety of plastic resources recreates in scenes including an altar for the veneration of the image of devotion. They are also in charge of making the decorations for the processions.

**Carpets:** Ephemeral carpet made mainly of natural materials such as flowers, sand, sawdust, and other recycled and/or do-it-yourself components. For its realization there are openwork molds made with various designs according to the creativity and the message to be expressed by the makers. The purpose of this central element of popular religiosity is to prevent contact with the ground of the image being honored.

**Cucurucho:** Penitent who wears a purple or black full-length tunic to attend and actively participate in a procession. He carries the procession on his shoulders and also usually practices other rites, such as burning incense and carrying part of the processional paraphernalia.

**Female devout porter:** A woman dressed in a black or white street dress, who actively participates in a processional procession. She carries the procession on her shoulders and also usually performs other rites, such as burning incense and carrying part of the processional paraphernalia.

**Fork:** "Y" shaped metal cane that serves as a support to the platform for the change of turn to carry the processional platform on the shoulders. When the turn of carrying ends, the devotees place the platform on the fork and leave the sacred space, delegating the carrying of the platform to the next turn.

**Platforms:** These are pieces of furniture with a high aesthetic sense and usefulness to carry on the shoulders the images of Jesus, the Virgin Mary and the accompanying saints (St. John the Apostle and St. Mary Magdalene). They are available in different sizes, reaching up to 20 meters long. Eucharistic or Passion of Christ elements are carved on their gables.

**Lira:** Long cane (variable size) to which a device in the form of a lyre is mounted on its upper end. It is used to raise the wiring system that abounds in certain cities, to avoid interrupting the passage of the processions.

**Mantle:** It is part of the clothing used to dress the images of passion, mainly those of the Virgin Mary. It is usually full of embroidery of diverse motifs, even with hand-painted works.

**Matilisqueate:** *Tabebuia rosa*, is a tree that blooms in Guatemalan territory during Lent and Holy Week. It is highly present in the collective imagination, being of great appreciation for the tradition, even being reproduced in processional ornaments.

**Orchards:** They are carpets that integrate fruits, vegetables, bread and other fruits of agricultural or artisan work. They are the complement for the carpet that is made inside the temple for the vigil of an image.

**Seven Fridays:** Devotional prayer that takes place during the seven Fridays that go from Friday after Ash Wednesday to Good Friday. It is performed before an image of Jesus of Nazareth.

**Tunic:** This can be the one used by the cucurucho for the processions or the one used by the images of Jesus of Nazareth and Buried Lord. They are adorned with embroidery in golden or silver threads with diverse symbols and iconographies of the passion or allusive to a brotherhood.

**Tunicle:** It is the garment with which the images of the Our Lady of Sorrows are dressed, as in the case of those of the images of Jesus, they are adorned with embroidery in silver or golden threads with diverse motifs.

**Viacrucis:** Prayer of the fourteen traditional stations of the Passion of Christ. It is generally prayed on Fridays inside the temples or in the homes before a domestic altar that is made for the time of Lent.

**Vialucis:** Prayer of the fourteen traditional stations that go from the resurrection of Jesus until he ascends to heaven. It is prayed from Easter Sunday onwards and is the closing of the Holy Week celebrations. It is still not as current, however, its use has been recorded in urban areas.

**Vigil:** It is one of the central activities of popular devotion in Guatemala. It is carried out in the temple where the image to which the homage will be paid is kept. It consists of an altar with flowers, carpets, orchards, concerts of funeral marches and a moment of veneration of the attendees. In the outskirts of the temples where the vigil is held, there is a whole series of elements that make up a kind of fair.

## References

Aguilar, F., Melchor Toledo, J., Grigsby, K., Castellanos, M. F., Figueroa, N., Calvillo, O., y Dardón, Y. (2009). *Contemplaciones: Historia, Arte y Cultura de la Semana Santa Guatemalteca*. Punto 3, S.A.