At the margins of the intersessional meeting in preparation for the Third International Conference on Small Island Developing States (SIDS), UNESCO organized the event on “The potentials, preservation and use of sustainable benefits of Underwater Cultural Heritage in SIDS”, focusing on Cultural Heritage - in particular Underwater Cultural Heritage - and its Potentials for Sustainable Tourism in SIDS States.

Under moderation of Ms. Vibeke Jensen (Director, UNESCO Liaison Office in New York) the invited panellists highlighted the benefits of preservation of the underwater cultural heritage and its potential for sustainable development of SIDS. H.E. Ms Jane Jimmy Chigiyal (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Permanent Representative of the Federated States of Micronesia to the UN) talked about the rich underwater cultural heritages of her country and the challenges for its conservation. Dr. Reginald Murphy (Secretary-General of the Antigua and Barbuda National Commission for UNESCO) followed by exposing the enormous amount of cultural and historic underwater heritage to be explored and sustainably used in the Caribbean. Finally, Dr. Della Scott Ireton (Associate Director and Northwest Region Director, Florida Public Archaeology Network, University of West Florida, USA) presented a number of efficient project used around the world to protect underwater cultural heritage such as the initiative “Underwater museums”.

Underwater cultural heritage has a particularly great importance and potential for Small Island Developing States because of the strong cultural connection to the sea shared by all of them. A large part of the traces of populations living in these regions are preserved under water. Due to their unique location the States part of the SIDS have got an exceptionally wide range of underwater cultural heritage sites and the 2001 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage would enable them to improve their protection in order to enhance an increasing development of these areas in terms of sustainability. Furthermore, cultural heritage has not only a strong importance for the identity of SIDS States, but it has also a high tourism development potential and can help to generate income and employment. Sustainable tourism represents an important current and future driver of SIDS economic growth and job creation.

- Speech delivered by Ms Ulrike Guérin, Secretariat UNESCO 2001 Convention, UNESCO HQ Paris.
- More information on the International Year of Small Island Development States.