

Shenzhen Declaration on Museums and Collections

We, experts and representatives of Member States and institutions assembled in Shenzhen, People's Republic of China,

Express our gratitude to the Chinese government, the Shenzhen municipal government and UNESCO for organizing a High Level Forum to discuss integrated approaches for protecting and promoting museums and collections, in the City of Shenzhen, UNESCO Creative City for Design,

Considering that the adoption of the 2015 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, their Diversity and their Role in Society by the UNESCO General Conference reaffirms the role of museums in the achievement of the mission of UNESCO, particularly through their contribution to the wide diffusion of culture, the education of humanity for justice, liberty and peace, and the free exchange of ideas and knowledge,

Reaffirming that museums are among the most important and prominent institutions for safeguarding our common heritage in its all forms – tangible and intangible, movable and immovable, terrestrial and underwater – and play an ever-increasing role in stimulating creativity and the development of the cultural and creative industries, thus contributing to material and spiritual well-being of humanity,

Noting their vital role in fighting against illicit trafficking and safeguarding, conserving and promoting heritage, both in times of peace and conflict or natural disaster,

Further considering that they play a fundamental role in promoting social cohesion, sustainable development and intercultural dialogue, and in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals,

Noting that under the effects of globalization and urbanization, market liberalization and mass tourism, together with the evolution of societies and their cultural norms, the role of museums has evolved considerably, with museums now facing new challenges and opportunities,

We call upon museums¹, national authorities, international organizations, governmental, non-governmental and private institutions, and individuals directly and indirectly engaged in culture, heritage² and museums to:

I. Diversity of museums and collections, and their operational modalities

¹ Museums as defined in paragraph 4 of the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation and in the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums.

² Heritage as defined in paragraph 6 of the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation.

1. Continuously engage in the revitalisation of museums, so that the diversity of their collections and operational modalities can be adapted to contemporary missions, and so that their activities can continue to promote museums as sites for national and international dialogue for developing inclusive discourses around heritage in order to lessen social, cultural and economic inequalities and to increase public enjoyment;
2. Ensure that fundamental functions of museums, as stated in the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation and in the ICOM codes of ethics, such as preservation, research, communication and education, are not compromised by economic concerns, but instead broadened to provide greater learning, enjoyment and exchange opportunities;
3. Value the role of museums in stimulating contemporary cultural expressions and local cultural economies, and integrate existing and new museum projects into an inclusive cultural landscape, respectful of environmental concerns and impartial in the sharing of benefits.

II. Role of museums in the protection of heritage in times of peace and conflict

4. Strongly promote adherence to the standards and principles of existing international and national instruments for the protection and promotion of heritage;
5. Reconfirm the role of museums as expert institutions and to respond to human needs, expanding their contribution to heritage protection and strengthening their engagement in networks to enhance heritage protection and valorisation globally;
6. Reinforce the resources, means and capacities of museums, their personnel, and stakeholders in times of peace and notably to cope with emergency situations, such as natural disasters and armed conflicts, notably through institutional development, museum personnel education, appropriate storage, preservation facilities, professional inventories and documentation, increasing access to innovative information and communication technologies, research on collections and protection, as well as authentication and provenance research when required;
7. Increase museums' capacities in preventive conservation and risk preparedness as overarching strategies of collections management;
8. Underline the moral obligation and capacity of museums to counter illicit trafficking in cultural objects, in particular through research, awareness raising and applying due-diligence;
9. Recognise the importance of local and national, private and governmental stakeholders, as well as local communities, in heritage protection, and, through advocacy, outreach and education, enable them to play a key role in creating sustainable solutions to protecting heritage and museums given their role in post-disaster and post-conflict recovery processes;

III. Responsibilities of museums – ethical, professional and technological standards for museums and professionals and community engagement

10. Encourage museums to adopt a rigorous code of ethics, based on the ICOM codes of ethics, and to engage in a continued reflection on ethical and professional standards as means to uphold public trust and increase their relevance in relation to societal requirements and norms;
11. Build constructive relationships and continued dialogue with communities with special reference to indigenous communities, in order to ensure broader access to collections and related information and participation in collection care, interpretation and programme development, enhancing their connections to cultural landscapes;
12. Encourage Member States to provide adequate mechanisms to allow free exchange of collections, exhibitions and expertise concerning conservation, restoration and research, and to maintain collections in public domains;
13. Promote the educational role of museums by providing opportunities for debates on history and controversial and challenging social issues to build mutual understanding and peace, and exchanging ideas on environmental and societal challenges, to build a better future for our globalized and multicultural societies;
14. Promote the role of museums as conveyors of scientific knowledge and the ideas of natural heritage, especially in achieving international development goals;
15. Adapt museums' contents to provide a variety of formal, non-formal and life-long open learning experiences through universal accessibility for various audiences, and remove barriers to disadvantaged groups and to persons with specific needs and capacities, contributing to foster information and media literacy in order to develop more critical publics; encourage diversity of staff and skills;

IV. Greater national and international cooperation

16. Develop, where possible, cooperation projects to promote the sharing and transfer of knowledge and experiences, and to address shared, comparable and divergent histories through exhibitions, education and joint projects, in the spirit of co-learning and of building intellectual and social capital, which are adapted and designed to respond to the specific needs of concerned museums and their audiences;
17. Commit to greater and sustained international cooperation, notably in the context of developing countries and museums threatened by conflict and illicit trafficking, in order to fill the gap in human and financial resources faced by museum institutions worldwide, while increasing participation from various stakeholders from the public, non-governmental and private sectors;

18. Support museum institutions to play a wider role as mediators among diverse audiences and in cultural diplomacy, as well as drivers of economic revitalisation and stimulators of creativity through initiatives including education and cultural tourism;
19. Promote the preservation of, research on and access to collections of public interest held in institutions that are not museums, as they help communities to better represent cultural diversity and their heritage;
20. Develop the necessary measures to place public and private museums and collections in a wider policy framework for achieving international, national and local development goals;
21. Encourage UNESCO to develop and implement programmes and projects, where appropriate, and in collaboration with the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), and other relevant partners, which promote an inclusive and integrated vision of museums and collections, to support capacity building and to provide guidelines for best practices in the spirit of the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation and this Declaration;
22. Encourage UNESCO, in cooperation with ICOM, to explore the possibility of publishing a global museum report;
23. Support the widespread adoption of the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation by fostering increased access to and collaboration among all types of museums and collections, and by encouraging non-profit private and public museums so as to be further integrated in international museum networks;
24. Integrate the UNESCO 2015 Recommendation into local and national legislation and policies and museum constitutions, while also calling upon UNESCO Member States to ratify, effectively implement and adhere to the existing UNESCO Culture Conventions.

Shenzhen, People's Republic of China

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