

PPG-PMUS Inaugural Address

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1. Introduction

Vice Rector, Ministry of Culture Representative, President of the Federal Council of Museology, Pro Rector, Colleagues, Students, Distinguished Guests, please accept special greetings on behalf of the International Council of Museums¹.

I am greatly honoured to have been invited on behalf of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) to address you in the context of this most prestigious event, and to thus make a contribution, however modest, to the enrichment of the vital and energetic museum profession in Brazil which this new programme now represents. I am also pleased to address this body particularly so since the International Council of Museums over which I have the privilege to preside has determined its intention to work more proactively with national and local museums organizations and training entities in addressing strategic issues which are affecting the museum's community.

Being myself from the broader region of Latin America and the Caribbean, I am deeply appreciative of museological programmes which seek to move beyond the traditional museum with its heavy reliance on object collections for unquestioned validation, which cannot adequately address the needs of its most critical and discerning audience, the local populace. Instead what is truly the heritage of our region are the sound, syntax, light, color, rhythm, scent, movement, space, texture and taste that complex blend of intangibles, which combined with the sub-conscious retention of memory, and the deliberate recalling of tradition orally which reclaim a fragmented heritage for which we need to find new ways to communicate to visitors, as well as ourselves.

My paper will therefore offer some perspectives on the global museum situation where both governments and communities wrestle with issues of identity versus insularity, self-worth and self-empowerment in the task of constructing/reconstructing and in some instances deconstructing- histories and heroes, as part of the process of nation-building. The establishment of appropriate standards of practice in the museum management field are thus very much part of the process.

Unirio's kind invitation to address you today has provided the opportunity to discuss issues related to the principles of ethics and justice.

Let me just offer an outline of what I will cover within this address. I will start with the global - outlining in a broad context, the establishment of ICOM, its mission and mandate. I will draw reference briefly to the historical development of museum training and museology in the context of ICOM. Then I will move to address some of the issues facing the museum community today which need to be addressed in terms of preparation of new generations of museum professionals. And finally, I will outline the strategies ICOM has developed and planned for implementation, detailing some recent initiatives being undertaken and then draw some conclusions to demonstrate the contribution which ICOM has made in achieving these goals.

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¹ Postgraduate Programme in Museology and Heritage - Official Opening of the I Academic Semester of the Programme. Inaugural Address delivered by Alissandra Cummins, President of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), at Universidade Federal do Estado Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August 21st, 2006. Postgraduate Programme in Museology and Heritage - Official Opening of the I Academic Semester of the Programme. Inaugural Address delivered by Alissandra Cummins, President of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), at Universidade Federal do Estado Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, August 21st, 2006

2. The global context

ICOM was founded in 1946 in the post-war spirit of reconstruction through culture, education and science, as one of the first cultural heritage NGO's., a year after the constitution of the UNESCO, and 60 years ago this year.

ICOM is a non-governmental non-profit association, primarily financed by membership fees and supported by various public and private organizations. Today, six decades since its foundation, the organization has become a unique, culturally diverse network of individuals and institutions that voluntarily contribute their expertise and resources to the preservation and protection of cultural and natural heritage worldwide. ICOM's more than 21,000 members - institutional as well as individual - in 148 countries, its 114 national committees, 30 international or scientific committees, 15 international affiliated organizations and six regional organizations attest to the inclusiveness that it has achieved, and are a tribute to the role it plays for the profession and for the world community.

After the reconstruction from the devastation of World War II, ICOM's role has been in constant evolution, adapting its structure and focus to the needs of the times.

From originally orchestrating the profession's response to the recovery of the damage inflicted upon the world's cultural heritage by the ravages of war, the organization has concentrated on communicating this very heritage as a means to ensure and to preserve core values of humanity.

Throughout, ICOM never lost sight of its memberships' needs: publications, courses, training sessions, capacity building workshops, seminars and regular General Conferences have been and are organized all over the world to promote networking and the exchange of expertise among museum professionals.

As museums are inherently interdisciplinary, cross-cultural, and educational enterprises, museum development became more and more identified with economic and social development and sustainability of towns, cities, regions and nations throughout the world. ICOM's role has been to support museum and professional development.

The organization recognized that it was also being called upon to set the standards for museum governance and professional practices, and in 1970 it adopted the *Ethics of Acquisitions*, that was to be followed in 1986 - 20 years this year - and precisely in Latin America, by the *Code of Professional Ethics*, the latter being of compulsory adherence by all of its members and institutions. Translated into many languages, the Code of Ethics has now become a benchmark for all its members and indeed for any professional museum body.

3. Museum training and museological development

In 1955 the ICOM Secretariat under the leadership of Georges-Henri Rivière took the initiative in proposing that ICOM should appoint one or more experts to carry out an international survey on the training and qualifications of museum professionals, with financial assistance of UNESCO. Three years later, Georges-Henri Rivière once again took the initiative this time on behalf of UNESCO itself at a regional seminar on the educational role of museums held here in Rio de Janeiro, at which he reported on "the training of museum workers and improvement of their qualifications", including in his review general issues in relation to museum training, three different levels of training need (defined as basic training, general training in museology and specialized or advanced training in museology), together with a wide ranging review of museum work as a profession and a career. This was later followed by a joint International Symposium with UNESCO on the educational and cultural role of museums, held in Paris in 1964.

ICOM's Committee for Administration and Personnel in 1966 announced plans for the holding of three experimental training courses under the direct auspices of ICOM, as part of the study of training methods, preparations were also made by ICOM for the bringing together of all the European experts working directly in the museum training field. This meeting was held in Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1967, the 13 participants being drawn from 8 European countries. The objective of the meeting was to try to co-ordinate the work of the small number of permanent museum training centres in the different

parts of Europe, under the leadership of ICOM, in the hope of co-ordinating their teaching programmes, diplomas and teaching methods, and, not least, to promote exchanges between the various European training centres of museum studies teachers, students and training philosophy.

The most far-reaching decision of the meeting was to pool information through the ICOM Secretariat on their respective training programmes and curricula with a view to the Secretariat preparing the first draft of what was variously described as a 'common elementary programme' or "basic syllabus" which, after further discussion and development, might be adopted as a common basis for both the existing training courses and for any new museum staff training programmes that might be proposed in the future. However, in addition the meeting resolved:

(a) that museology should be recognized as a true discipline in its own right, and that

(b) it was necessary to place as much importance on the teaching of museology as on museography, and distinguish between the training for future heads of museums, who, it was felt, must receive a complete training, museological as well as museographical, in contrast with future museum technicians whose training could be strictly museographical in content.

Patrick Boylan has noted that: "I think it is fair to say that whilst entirely well-intentioned, the attempt in (b) above to distinguish at the point of entry to museum work between future "museologists" who it was assumed would progress to the most senior levels of the profession, and "museographers" who would remain at a strictly technical level, has been a source of considerable difficulty and at times tension in subsequent years. Despite the ever increasing complexity of museum work, and the consequent blurring of what were I believe already artificial boundaries in 1967, the perceived dichotomy between the curator or museologist, and all other categories of museum employee is still a source of difficulty today, despite forthright challenge to these assumptions by the ICOM Bergen Symposium held in 1981". The evolution of the international committee of ICOM, provided ICOM with its constant forum for examination of the issues emanating from the continued debate, and its central context for the evolution of an attendant museological language in response to this debate.

It is perhaps in this context that ICOM most appreciates Brazil's work in the field. It has embraced the values and institutionalized the processes necessary to fulfilling this critical mission. There are some countries (some regions) which establish the structure of a museological process on which to mount their work, but Brazil is on the few locations where one experiences an inherent sense of the museological ethic underpinning museum development activities. In this context, I really must take this opportunity to congratulate UNIRIO for its achievement with today's inauguration of a Postgraduate programme in Museology and Heritage. This is a critical step in completing the creation of national standards in professional practice.

4. Issues affecting the museum community today

The awareness of a pervasive globalizing process that threatens the identity of minority cultures - and with it world cultural heritage as a whole - prompted ICOM to embrace new initiatives to protect cultural diversity. As World Bank President James Wolfensohn has pointed out,

In a world that is becoming increasingly globalized and where there are pressures for a similar culture throughout all our countries, what is abundantly clear is that it is essential for us to nurture, to revere, and to support the culture and history of the countries in which we operate. Very simply, we do not believe that you can move forward unless you have a recognition of the base and the past from which we have come.

You are probably aware that we are at a crossroads in terms of defining conceptually and through international norms and standards how heritage is being considered. Indeed, culture and heritage are not merely being redefined but nuanced. Society is slowly coming to accept - not without understandable difficulties - the wider notion of heritage as to include the intangible - expressions of cultural diversity such as languages, music,

dance, theatre, social practices (rituals and celebrations) and traditional knowledge - as an indissoluble component of the tangible; it is no longer sufficient, for museums and heritage practitioners to address only the direct challenges related to the conservation and communication of the objects in their care - of their tangible heritage.

Thus future professionals like yourselves, require now training in expertise and skills different than the traditional ones taught until recently in most museum studies programs to enable you to care for heritage in all its elements. This is why ICOM was so pleased to learn of the scope and breadth of the museological programme you are launching today.

As noted by Pierre Nora in his *Apologie du périssable* (Ode to the Perishable),

the extension of the concept of heritage has been accompanied by an outstanding diversification... It is in fact a new form of managing our relationship with time and space which is being set, a vast outburst of our historical memory and a shift in its traditional supports of reference.

Having come to accept that the concept of heritage includes the intangible as an indissoluble component of the tangible, it is no longer sufficient, for museums and heritage practitioners to address only the direct challenges related to the conservation and communication of the objects in their care - of their tangible heritage. ICOM has identified and has been promoting the need for the complementary and comprehensive protection and preservation of both tangible and intangible heritage. This action signals ICOM's preoccupation with such global measures and mirrors the organization's active engagement in the process of elaborating a strong, principled position with respect to international conventions for the protection of cultural heritage in its widest sense. We are positioning museums as essential partners in the process of developing national regional strategies for the implementation of the International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.

In this respect, ICOM has been promoting, even before 2002, the protection of Intangible heritage worldwide, as balancing force to the homogenising effects of globalization. In 2002, ICOM produced what is known as the Shanghai Charter where our members affirmed the

significance of creativity, adaptability and the distinctiveness of peoples, places and communities as the framework in which the voices, the values, the traditions, languages, oral history, folk life and so on are recognized and promoted in all museological and heritage practices.

This Charter, distinguished colleagues, predated the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage demonstrating that, through you, the heritage practitioners, our organization can, indeed, shape the course of society.

Even before the Convention was adopted, ICOM was invited by UNESCO to participate in the evaluation of the nominations for the Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The proclamation for example of La Samba de Roda do Recôncavo de Bahia as just such a masterpiece of intangible heritage attests to Brazil sensibility towards intangible heritage and to your country's proactive role in its protection.

Now that the Convention has been ratified by more than 30 countries, and has thus entered into force, ICOM will still play a crucial role in advising the corresponding Intergovernmental Committee on direction and funding priorities. It is certainly gratifying to all of us that ICOM's voice and leadership role are being sought out by international agencies.

Another recent initiative worthy of mention, developed in the wake ICOM's General Conference on the theme of Museums and Intangible Heritage in Korea in 2004, is the publication of the **International Journal of Intangible Heritage**, the world's first scholarly journal dedicated to intangible heritage, published in Korea with ICOM-Korea and the National Folk Museum of Korea, which underscores our commitment to this aspect of mankind's legacy.

But all our efforts would have little impact if museum professionals and particularly, professionals now being formed do not to acquire different expertise and skills. This is why ICOM tasked ICTOP - its scientific committee dedicated to training of personnel with the job of developing guidelines to incorporate intangible heritage competencies into the ICOM Curriculum Guidelines for Professional Development that it had previously produced. Similarly, ICOM's International Committee for Museology, was entrusted with the

articulation of theoretical approaches to defining museum professions and the development of the profession with its main focus being the functions, the activities and the role in society of the museum as a repository of collective memory. It has actively engaged the museum community as an international forum for museological debate.

The following quote from the ICTOP document will give you a clear sense of the challenge facing today's and tomorrow's museum professionals:

Intangible heritage is by definition people-oriented rather than object-centered. At its core, implementation of the new initiative will transform the relationships between museums and their audiences and stakeholders. Among the results will be requests by people from diverse backgrounds to participate in substantive dialogues about their intangible heritage, and to share authority in defining and curating a museum's interpretation of their heritage. The outcome of these efforts will be a paradigm shift of exceptional magnitude. During the transition, museums will be in a state of flux. But as professionals in the field, it is a task we must undertake. Understanding and respecting both tangible and intangible heritage and their relationships is critical if we are to make closer connections with our visitors and our communities.

In this respect I have developed an interest in how museums access a deeper heritage through memory, whether individual, institutional or community, memory is the key to unlocking the violent yet often silent heritage which many of us share. I recently became familiar with the excellent work of South Africa's District Six Museum, and indeed, the "La Maison des esclaves" in Senegal, both of which are part of the International Coalition for Historic Sites of Conscience, featured as "disaster museums"

In the context of a site museum, the intangible heritage of manmade disastrous events such as war, slavery, genocide, and apartheid can indeed be made tangible and translated into educational and proactive terms for the everyday visitor. The oral histories, music, dance, languages and other immaterial traces of entire minority cultures are being unearthed by a new kind of museum curator whom we might call an intangible archaeologist. The sense of place, the local community and the sites connected to events that have transpired function together to engrave on the minds of new peoples the lessons to be learned from the past, not to emboss resentment on spirits, but to forge new tools for understanding and dialogue, to find peaceful means to resolving conflict, and to build the bases for sustainable and responsible cultural development.

With commemorations of the abolition of slavery set for 2007 in the Anglophone world and various projects extending UNESCO's Slavery Route project, we can observe with joy and great expectations that a new era is opening up to abolish oppression and ignorance, war and greed. The recognition of the horrific sufferings in the guides a new generation to forging freedom by recalling such horrors to eradicate the conditions for their recurrence in the future.

An additional initiative in the protection of cultural diversity is yet another ICOM major commitment: the ongoing battle against the illicit traffic of cultural property that erodes the identity of communities by depriving them of referential elements of their cultural heritage.

ICOM launches public awareness campaigns with the simultaneous publication of illicit traffic-prevention tools, such as the *100 Missing Objects* series (3 such publications to date BRIEFLY EXPLAIN WHAT THEY ARE - Africa, Latin America and Europe), later complemented by the Red List publications (4 to date: one for Latin America, one for Africa, one for Iraq and the latest one for Afghanistan BRIEFLY EXPLAIN WHAT THEY ARE) featuring culturally protected objects. The INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization, just to mention two international agencies, have found these tools to be of invaluable use, and again, turn tot ICOM for expertise and assistance in fighting illegal activities in the cultural and natural heritage domain.

These awareness-raising tools are complemented by the relatively recent addition of **Object ID** - the minimum standards for documenting and inventorying art objects (developed by the J.Paul Getty Institute and now administered by ICOM), the latter two being essential elements in the fight against illicit trafficking in cultural property.

Governments, international agencies, museums and art institutions are all enlisted in this truly arduous battle, where ICOM has scored significant victories (MENTION FBI AND THE SMUGGLING NETWORK OF PRE-COLOMBIAN ARTIFACTS FROM ECUADOR); but,

of course, the war still goes on and requires that we all be actors on the battlefield. A strict adherence by museums and professionals to our Code of Ethics, where it concerns acquisition of art work, or even their exhibition, and donation, will without a doubt help us mitigate this criminal activity.

As illicit traffic has increasingly become the object of international and national legislation, new issues have come to the fore, issues which ICOM is dealing with or on which it is defining its position.

A more recent development is ICOM's response to the new restitution initiatives that have been occurring with greater frequency over the past few years. Ever since the London General Conference of 1983, ICOM has supported and encouraged the amicable settlement of disputes on ownership of cultural property and on restitution of cultural heritage that has an iconic value to the peoples from whom it originated. Even though there might be no clear legal claim to support such requests, consideration must nevertheless be given to the moral obligation which falls on all of us to recognize the validity of such claims. Increasingly such disputes end up in long and extremely expensive legal actions, often questioning and damaging the credibility of institutions involved.

ICOM has recently revitalized the established policy of seeking voluntary settlements to such disputes, and to encourage and help equally both museums and those making claims against them to pursue more informal mediation as an alternative to court actions. Consequently, the ICOM Executive Council adopted at its December 2005 meeting in Vienna a Mediation Process in Resolution of Disputes over the Ownership of Objects in Museum Collections.

In addition, ICOM has been taking a proactive approach to the preparation of mechanisms responding to the needs of countries caught up in the devastation which accompanies natural as well as manmade disasters. Already established is our Museum Emergency Preparedness Programme, under which umbrella we have just recently conclude a 7-month long course in Asia, called *Teamwork for Integrated Emergency Management*, dealing with all aspects of risk management: from assessment and prevention to response and recovery. In December 2004 ICOM's participation in the international reaction to the tsunami of 26 December resulted in the creation of the Disaster Relief Task Force, the Disaster Relief Fund, and the Disaster Relief Website. The knowledge acquired, the professional network created and the documentation collected on occasion of the Museums Emergency Programme during the last three years have made possible a rapid and effective contribution of contents for the Disaster Relief Website, which, in turn, is designed to serve as a permanent tool for any country in the world and for any other disaster affecting it.

ICOM also established a Disaster Relief for Museums Fund to underwrite the costs of the most adequate assistance needed by disaster-stricken museums - through public awareness campaigns in the media, site surveys, relief projects, post facto capacity building programs, production of risk management tools, or any other action deemed necessary.

ICOM continues to enhance its available tools and develop new ones to addresses the protection of cultural heritage and cultural diversity. The Information and Communication technologies, via the Internet, certainly pose a challenge to the diverse cultural richness of humanity; nonetheless, they are also a tool to protect it. ICOM promoted and administered *dotMuseum* Top Level Domain and intends to turn it into a supra vehicle for global outreach and research on ICT heritage applications, knowledge dissemination, awareness raising, and digitized services. New opportunities are being tested in distance learning (through ICOM's innovative *Teamwork for Museum Preparedness* program that I mentioned before). Both *dotMuseum* and ICOM's Website will engage the active involvement of the international museum community and through the multi-lingual aspects of the Internationalized Domain Name (IDN) , ICOM will collaborate in the re-invigoration of threatened languages and communities, thus contributing in yet another way to the protection of cultural diversity, this time in cyberspace.

Such activity in the safeguarding of cultural heritage could not ignore intellectual property rights, particularly of indigenous communities, and traditions, all of which to ICOM are essential elements of intangible heritage protection. ICOM, therefore, not only supports UNESCO's 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, but is also in the process of establishing a partnership with the World

Intellectual Property Organization. One of the first activities that will be contemplated in this collaboration will be a consultation - among museums and expert members of ICOM - on guidelines that WIPO is drafting for museums on IP. As Molly Torsen eloquently states in her "Intellectual Property Guidelines for Museums and Archives" project introduction,

Museums...and art historians fulfill invaluable roles in preserving the rich cultural heritage of our planet and in promoting a broader understanding and respect for different cultures. From ancient traditions to community histories, IP issues arise throughout the process of collecting, cataloguing, studying recording inventorying, conserving and presenting these different aspects of culture. More and more often, cultural institutions, indigenous communities and other stakeholders in cultural heritage are seeking information and advice regarding appropriate strategies that take relevant IP issues into account.

Working to advance the notion of an inclusive and unified approach to the safeguarding, identification and conservation of cultural heritage in all its aspects is a challenge thrown out to all heritage agencies. ICOM, as mandated by its General Assembly, is poised to respond by reshaping itself into a more flexible and capable organization equipped to address the challenge of change and diversity. This it does by fostering a visionary spirit capable of stimulating the increased involvement of the broad range of membership and heritage practitioners - present and future - in upholding and fostering its core values.

Over the past two years, as President of ICOM, I have had the privilege of meeting with museum professionals in Asia, Africa, Europe, and in North and Latin America, and witnessed the vigor and creativity of museum professionals and their good work and their ability to constantly address new challenges. It is this unique capability that all of you in this room have that enables museums and organizations like the International Council of Museums to spearhead social change.

5. ICOM's strategic plan

ICOM, an international NGO with over 21,000 members, and growing, is mandated by its mission to address changes in the cultural heritage environment, and to assist its constituency in acquiring the tools it requires to better protect, interpret and conserve cultural heritage, particularly through the application of ICOM's *Code of Ethics for Museums and Museum Professionals*. In response to the above, ICOM has developed a Strategic Plan with the following strategic priorities.

- ICOM generates and disseminates knowledge
- ICOM is proactive
- ICOM is inclusive

The protection of Cultural heritage is universally perceived as an essential element in the preservation of the identity of peoples, as well as a means for providing economic sustainability. Consequently, new museum projects are being undertaken all over the world, and more professionals must be capacitated to fulfil the needs of those institutions. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) present unprecedented opportunities to inform this growing professional community, and to explore innovative approaches for the protection of cultural heritage and cultural property within a public context.

ICOM will provide the necessary expertise to take on new and ongoing challenges, to facilitate greater access to that expertise worldwide, and to address the needs of this constituency and stakeholders, primarily through its 114 National Committees, 30 International Committees, and major partnerships. The delivery of specific training will substantially improve ICOM's ability to provide society with an environment better equipped for the protection of cultural heritage.

ICOM will enhance its available tools and develop new ones to meet these goals. The UNESCO-ICOM Information Centre, repository of a unique collection of resource material on museum and cultural heritage practice, will take decisive steps to facilitate direct consultation by researchers and museum professionals; additionally, it will seek to make its bibliographical and archival resources available online. ICOM promoted and administered dotMuseum Top Level Domain will benefit from an increased commitment

to turn it into a supra vehicle for global outreach, knowledge dissemination, awareness raising, and digitised services. This opens up opportunities now being tested (through ICOM's innovative *Teamwork for Museum Preparedness* program) in distance learning. Both dotMuseum and ICOM's Website will engage the active involvement of the international museum community and through the multi-lingual aspects of IDN, ICOM will collaborate in the re-invigoration of threatened languages and communities. The presence of museum professionals from LD Cs, DCs and CTs will be prioritised in ICOM's knowledge-sharing fora (the Triennial Conferences, and the annual Conferences of its National, International Committees and Regional Organizations). However, because financial resources must be obtained to realize this ambitious expertise-sharing objective, new links and partnerships with the academic world, international and funding agencies will be explored to support ICOM's efforts.

ICOM is committed to identifying and addressing issues that affect the museum and the heritage community. Best museum practices, illicit traffic in cultural property and risk management for museums will continue to be dealt with through ICOM's internationally recognized tools (ICOM's *Code of Ethics for Museums*, the *Risk Management Program*, and the *Disaster Relief for Museums* initiative). ICOM will undertake a major effort to develop and share its perspectives on these and new issues - such as protection of intangible heritage, of cultural diversity, cultural identity in cyberspace - to enlist wide international public support and active collaboration. ■