

COVID-19: Call of ICCROM for Protecting Heritage

In the midst of this unprecedented global crisis, ICCROM expresses its sympathy and solidarity to its Member States, and to people everywhere, for the loss of lives and suffering triggered by COVID-19. ICCROM expresses its heartfelt thanks to healthcare workers and all those who are on the front lines of this crisis, working tirelessly to save human lives and maintain the flow of essential goods and services.

The important role of cultural heritage in times of crisis

ICCRROM draws the world's attention to the significant role of culture and cultural heritage in providing social and post-trauma support, enabling social cohesion and the building of resilience of communities during times of crisis. In line with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, ICCROM stresses the important role of culture, cultural heritage and associated traditional knowledge in sustainable development and climate action, as well as the contribution heritage can have to reducing the risk of a pandemic. ICCROM also emphasizes the importance of sustainable habitats that ensure the safe and healthy living of people in harmony with nature.

Risks and difficulties for cultural heritage during and post-crisis

There have been numerous encouraging online projects around the world, with heritage sites and museums opening their doors virtually, offering places of leisure and learning during this period of isolation. Yet there are also worrying signs of difficulties faced by the cultural heritage sector and associated communities, triggered particularly by the loss of revenues and livelihoods. There are also concerns about the limited availability of resources for heritage protection and management in the months to come, and the risk of possible neglect driven by economic difficulties arising from the crisis. Protecting and conserving our cultural heritage must be included in all recovery plans and post-crisis development projects. For this reason, ICCROM would also like to express its concerns for the increasing vulnerability of cultural heritage protection and conservation, as well as of cultural industries and living heritage, which may cause hardships for craftspersons and artists, among many other culture professions.

ICCRROM's call for action

ICCRROM, as an intergovernmental organization with a unique mandate to promote good practices for cultural heritage protection and conservation worldwide, calls upon its Member States, through national and local authorities, managers of heritage sites and institutions, cultural workers and traditional custodians, as well as the public, civil society and private sectors to:

- follow all necessary precautions against this virus as outlined and advised by the World Health Organization (WHO) and national governments, and establish protocols to ensure the safety of all staff and their families, visitors and communities;
- undertake all possible measures to reduce risks to heritage sites and collections during periods of closure, and establish emergency preparedness and response procedures for heritage sites, museums, archives and institutions in close coordination with relevant humanitarian and response agencies;
- consult qualified heritage professionals to ensure that any temporary use of heritage sites, museums, archives and institutions as hospitals or quarantine shelters are reversible and that decontamination methods will bear minimal impact on heritage;
- acknowledge the essential quality of cultural heritage for human wellbeing;
- acknowledge the social and economic value of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and continue to support its protection and management as an important contributor to recovery from this crisis. Doing so provides favorable conditions for wellbeing, healthy livelihoods and enhanced quality of life for people and communities, and the eventual resumption of cultural tourism that supports conservation goals;
- include the protection and conservation of cultural heritage in any post-crisis recovery plans, and prevent any neglect of cultural heritage or reduction of its protection schemes and conservation plans in times of eventual economic downturn;
- undertake measures to promote cultural heritage conservation for sustainable economic benefit, especially for local communities and small businesses that depend on heritage for their livelihoods;
- undertake measures to support the livelihoods cultural and knowledge bearers, including craftspersons, conservation professionals and artists, among many others, and especially those who are most vulnerable;
- consider both new and traditional ways of using heritage to increase understanding of its benefits for the greater public good and human wellbeing, including as a way of reducing social and economic inequalities and improving local governance;
- consider new ways of harnessing information technology to promote the appreciation of humanity's cultural heritage, building the capacities of cultural custodians in their use of virtual media and e-learning methods, and involving younger generations in the process.



ICCROM expresses its willingness to collaborate with the international community, and in particular its Member States, UNESCO, and other international partners during these challenging times, with the aim of promoting the conservation and protection of cultural heritage in all its forms for humanity. ICCROM also avails itself of any opportunity to join efforts aimed at supporting more resilient, peaceful and inclusive societies, together with institutions working in the heritage sector and beyond.