# Delhi Declaration on Heritage and Democracy

The 19th General Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS)[i] in Delhi, India on 11–15 December 2017 convened approximately 1000 heritage professionals from 113 nations around the world.

***This Declaration reflects the commitment by ICOMOS to Heritage and Democracy as key ingredients in a people-based approach to sustainable development. Heritage is a fundamental right and responsibility of all. It is a starting point for a meaningful and equitable future that secures and celebrates diversity, social engagement, equality and justice for all cultures.***

*Preamble*

*Acknowledging* that heritage constitutes a key resource in enhancing quality of life and social cohesion, fostering economic development in a fast-changing global environment,

*Recognising* heritage as a fundamental human right,

*Considering* that democracy gives both rights and duties to individuals, diverse communities and nations,

*Further considering* the imperative for mutual respect, diversity, plurality, syncretism and peaceful coexistence; and the right of all cultures, each with a distinctive heritage, to practice individual beliefs and conserve multicultural legacies,

*Recognising* that heritage is increasingly threatened in many parts of the world by deterioration, loss through neglect, deliberate destruction or inappropriate management; which impoverishes individuals, groups, nations and humankind as a whole,

*Realising* the additional threats caused by natural hazards and disasters, climate change, rising sea levels, deliberate destruction and armed conflicts; and recognizing the need for risk preparedness, disaster mitigation and increased resilience,

*Taking into account* the reality of human migration and population growth,

*Respecting* a people-centric culture-specific approach in various geographical regions inhabited by a multitude of diverse communities that have contributed to the creation of the composite heritage of a place,

*Recognising* the role that digital technologies and modern communications now play in heritage management,

*Recalling* the existing international conventions, recommendations and other documents concerning heritage as a basis for understanding and treatment,

and

*Emphasizing* the need for professional heritage expertise and multidisciplinary cooperation as an integral part of policy-making throughout various community-development processes:

***On behalf of the peoples we serve, ICOMOS addresses this Declaration to the UN, UNESCO and other relevant international bodies, all levels of government and authorities in individual nations, institutions for education and research, non-governmental organisations and, in particular, individuals and groups of people at the local level, as well as all other stakeholders to:***

1. ***Manage heritage resources for our common future***
   *Respecting values, significance and authenticity*

   The concept of heritage has widened considerably from monuments, groups of buildings and sites to include larger and more complex areas, landscapes, settings, and their intangible dimensions, reflecting a more diverse approach. Heritage belongs to all people; men, women, and children; indigenous peoples; ethnic groups; people of different belief systems; and minority groups. It is evident in places ancient to modern; rural and urban; the small, every-day and utilitarian; as well as the monumental and elite. It includes value systems, beliefs, traditions and lifestyles, together with uses, customs, practices and traditional knowledge. There are associations and meanings; records, related places and objects. This is a more people-centred approach.

   Conserving significance, integrity and authenticity must be fully considered in the management of heritage resources.

   Mutual understanding and tolerance of diverse cultural expressions add to quality of life and social cohesion. Heritage resources provide an opportunity for learning, impartial interaction and active engagement, and have the potential to reinforce diverse community bonds and reduce conflicts.

   The culture and dynamics of heritage and heritage places are primary resources for attracting creative industries, businesses, inhabitants and visitors, and foster economic growth and prosperity.

   Legislative protection of heritage is the responsibility of all levels of government. Laws and regulations should respect connections between communities and place; foster functional continuities; and require the inclusion of conservation objectives in development initiatives. Heritage management and planning regulations require transparent systems for informing stakeholders, assessing and balancing potentially conflicting views and interests.

2. ***Develop ethical principles and education for managing heritage resources***
   *Providing guidance to inform decisions and practice*

   Ethical principles should be established and implemented to guide heritage conservation and management. These include principles for interpretation, adaptation, intervention, and for sustaining complex heritage systems and places, and should engage local and interested communities and consider the historic layers that contribute to the evolution of the place.

   Intellectual and physical access to heritage resources empowers people and communities to safeguard it. Traditional knowledge and professional expertise constitute important resources for communities to add to the understanding of values, sense of place, and awareness.

   Specialised education is necessary for each heritage discipline and should not be reduced to a generalist approach. An understanding of cultural diversity is also essential in heritage education, interpretation and training programmes at all levels – for professionals and artisans; adults and children.

All levels of government have a responsibility to identify, assess and document heritage places and to promote awareness of their significance. Access to both traditional knowledge and evidence-based documentation is fundamental to this approach. A wide range of communication technologies and media should be utilized by governments, institutions and interested communities for collecting, sharing, interpreting and disseminating data.

3. ***Promote inclusive democratic community engagement processes***
   *Of all the people, by all the people, for all the people*

   Heritage is a non-renewable resource, often shared between communities, neighbouring nations and larger regions and reflects an amalgamation of cultural influences.

   Community participation in planning, the integration of traditional knowledge and diverse intercultural dialogues in collaborative decision-making will facilitate well-reasoned solutions and good use of resources reflecting the four pillars of sustainability.

   Cultural identities should not be compromised by uniform and insensitive planning. The protection and sustenance of heritage resources should be the basis of development policies and planning programmes, integrating heritage-conservation strategies within the larger goals of sustainable development. Specific guidance is necessary to ensure the harmonious insertion of contemporary interventions into heritage settings.

4. ***Ensure and respect the continuity of living heritages***
   *Heritage conservation is a condition of sustainable development*

   There is a close relationship between nature, culture and people. Cultural places and landscapes, along with communities, traditional management systems and beliefs, constitute living heritage and cultural identity.

   Appropriate conservation and management of living heritage is achievable through intergenerational transfer of knowledge and skills in cooperation with communities and facilitated by multidisciplinary expertise.

   Traditional building methods and community structures have inherent sustainability that has been tested and shaped over time. Historic settlements tend to use limited resources efficiently; favour interaction and solidarity; and secure cultural continuity.

   The responsibility for safeguarding heritage resources extends between nations, communities and cultures. Intentional destruction which aims to erase cultural identity is a breach of fundamental human rights. Cultural recovery is vital to regaining community dignity. Solidarity and support should be extended to cultures, nations and communities in need.

   Recognition and support must be given to those persons and communities who embody cultural knowledge and skills for the long-term perpetuation of living heritage.

**It is our duty to conserve the significance of the multicultural, multidimensional heritage resources we have inherited and hand them down to following generations. Engaging and training new generations in the understanding and protection of the inherited values of our living and shared heritage will sustain the plural legacies of the past[ii].**

**References**

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