

President's Annual Report to the Annual General Assembly and Advisory Committee Istanbul, Turkey, October 2016

I have to begin by thanking the President and the members of our Turkish National Committee for organizing our 2016 General Assembly in Istanbul. For almost two years they have been planning the event and effectively securing from their national and local authorities the considerable support necessary to host ICOMOS. Istanbul is one of the world's great cities and I hope that all will take time to visit and enjoy the great cultural treasures of the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires as well as that of the Republican era in the 20th Century.

The year that has transpired since we last met in Fukuoka has seen the maturation of important regional structures in the ICOMOS Advisory Committee. The Committees of the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa have developed regional networks in order to share resources and identify regional needs. We are hopeful for the Arab region, where, with the support of Mustapha Khanoussi, we will be signing before the end of the year a Memorandum of Understanding with the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ALECSO), and where the newly energized Saudi National Committee has finished the translation of the ICOMOS doctrinal documents into Arabic. The European group has also been strengthened through the Memorandum of Understanding signed with the European Confederation of Conservators-Restorers Organisation (ECCO), an initiative that was led by Board Member Stefan Belishki.

Now that the drafting of new model Statutes for National Committees has been completed by the International committee on Legal, Administrative and Financial Issues (ICLAFI) to be in consonance with the ICOMOS Statutes approved in Florence, the way is open for the creation of new National Committees. For this work, I would like to recognize the selfless efforts of Vice President Gideon Koren. I am also happy to report that, together with Gaia Jungeblodt in the Secretariat, Gideon has guided a group of Russian professionals in the re-establishment of a National Committee in the Russian Federation, an endeavor that has taken over a year to bring about but that now is a reality.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Vice President Alfredo Conti, together with Ofelia Sanou of Costa Rica, has been working on the establishment of a National Committee in El Salvador. For my part, over the past couple of years, I have been working with heritage communities in the Eastern Caribbean, a sub-region where the presence of ICOMOS has been limited to Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago. I am hopeful that by the time of the General Assembly in New Delhi next year we will have official delegations from National Committees in Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. I am also working on bringing back to life the National Committee in Colombia, a country where a huge heritage professional community exists but where the National Committee has been inactive for more than two decades.

The networks and the work of our Scientific Committees also continue to expand through the many symposia and initiatives undertaken. The revision of doctrinal documents on the conservation of wood and of historic gardens and cultural landscapes is well underway, and a new International Scientific Committee on sacred and religious heritage places is now a reality thanks to the hard work of Britta Rudolf in Germany. The International Scientific Committee on Rock Art is being strengthened through the new energy brought by the membership of the internationally active *Grupo de Investigación de Arte Rupestre* (GIPRI) in Colombia.

Once more this year, I have been privileged to witness first-hand the energy of ICOMOS by having been invited by heritage agencies and institutions in Belgium, China, Cuba, Germany, Mexico and Saudi Arabia to take part in a number of important activities that have also involved our members in those countries. Our Committee on Fortifications and Military Heritage has also invited me to the annual symposium being organized by Adriana Careaga in Uruguay.

I also want to recognize Andrew Potts of the United States of America for orchestrating the participation of ICOMOS in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Congress held in Hawaii to address the of converging practices in the conservation of natural and cultural properties. Working with Jioty Hosagrahr of India, Andrew has also worked in preparing the participation of ICOMOS in the Habitat III meeting in Quito this year as well as in the incorporation of cultural property in the sustainable development goals of the United Nations.

The world's attention has continued to be fixed over the course of this last year in the armed conflicts in the Middle East, and for ICOMOS, our preoccupation has had a special focus on the destruction of the cultural heritage of the region that dates from antiquity and the onset of Western traditions, and continue on down to the more recent past. To mitigate the effect of the ongoing and potential destruction of these heritage places, ICOMOS has been working with the CyArk Foundation of the United States to document heritage sites at risk in Syria and Iraq through 3-D scanning and other rapid documentation methods. To accomplish this, we have provided capacity building and equipment to the staff of the Directorate General of Antiquities and Museums in Syria with the generous support of the Arcadia Foundation in the United Kingdom, as well as from the UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut.

As we discussed last year in Fukuoka, the destructive crisis in the Middle East and the earthquakes in Nepal and the more recent ones, such as the ones in Italy, Myanmar and Central China, have renewed our attention on authenticity as it relates the issue of when, where and how reconstruction of heritage places is admissible. This has been a central concern of the heritage community since the beginning of the 19th century, and one that we thought had been laid to rest by the Venice Charter and later by the Nara document. However, the rise in reconstruction for the sake of enhancing interpretation, as an anchor to weakened cultural identities or even for commercial purposes, coupled with the waves of destruction from natural and human-induced disasters have brought new levels of complexity to the issue. A very productive symposium held at our headquarters in Paris was organized by the Secretariat in March and a second one will be held in Bologna next year, related to the Universities Forum being organized by Vice President Toshiyuki Kono. Thus, reconstruction is a topic of intensified discussion this past year, and should remain so until ICOMOS develops consensus on what guidance to provide regarding the validity of reconstruction.

Also in Fukuoka last year, I announced the appointment of a task force to explore the establishment of of an ICOMOS Forum for Universities, perhaps outside the existing structure of National Committees, but definitely linked to that of the International Scientific Committees. As stated then, the purpose of this initiative was to attempt to engage entire universities in ICOMOS in ways that would go beyond simply welcoming isolated programs related directly to conservation, such as graduate architectural conservation programs. This initiative is meant to respond to the evolution in the roles that heritage has come to play in contemporary societies, which demand many more disciplines than simply those that we have traditionally involved in the conservation of material properties. Only universities possess that full spectrum of knowledge that ICOMOS now needs to accomplish its mission. Unfortunately not much progress has been made in this direction other than the survey conducted by Vice President Alfredo Conti of the members identified as being connected with academic institutions. While in Istanbul I will be meeting with a few academics who have expressed interest in forging ahead with this initiative.

In closing, I would like to say a few words about the vastly improved conditions at the Secretariat, even though I realize that the Secretary General's report will provide a thorough accounting. After years of search, ICOMOS has finally been blessed with Marie-Laure Lavenir, our Director General who possesses excellent management, negotiating and diplomatic skills, as well as a clear vision of where ICOMOS should be headed. This last year she accomplished a restructuring of the ICOMOS World Heritage Unit, assigning Gwenaelle Bourdin with the responsibility for nominations. Gwenaelle has ably discharged her new duties and deserves our appreciation for a job well done. Therefore, on behalf of all ICOMOS, I want to thank Marie-Laure and all the staff for working together in bringing order and a fresh breeze of conviviality into our house in Paris. I know that many of you want to see more reporting on all our activities and more information circulated to the membership or posted on our website. This is a goal we all share. However, in spite of the many improvements at the Secretariat we all must be aware that our revenue stream is not sufficient to support the staff that would be needed to fulfill all your wishes and expectations. As things are, the present magnitude of the workload exceeds our abilities, and the high level of professionalism that

characterizes our Secretariat is only possible due to the dedication, commitment and – why not – the love for ICOMOS on the part of our staff.

I also wish to thank the members of the Board and the Bureau of ICOMOS for continuing to work collegially towards our common goals. It is a pleasure and an honor to work with you.