ICOMOS Appeal to
Protect and Preserve New Zealand's Rich Cultural Heritage
15 March 2011

The destructive earthquake that struck Christchurch, New Zealand on 22 February 2011 has caused unimaginable loss of life and property. Our thoughts are with those who are bearing this grave situation with courage and determination.

Unfortunately the earthquake has also caused severe damage to New Zealand's rich cultural heritage within the historic city of Christchurch. As the government and the communities move towards the rehabilitation phase of this disaster, the social, cultural, symbolic and historic importance of Christchurch's built heritage cannot be underestimated for the long term psychosocial recovery of the population of Christchurch and New Zealand.

In the light of this tragic event, and the impact that it has had not only on New Zealand's heritage, ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, urges the national and local governments, municipal councils, professional associations and others to give careful consideration towards the following in recovery efforts after this disaster:
- the immediate securing, stabilization and protection of Christchurch's cultural heritage buildings in the short term, as opposed to immediate demolition; followed by,
- the longer-term assessment, protection, restoration and retrofitting necessary to rebuild and protect the heritage buildings from future disasters, and
- integration of these in the broader rehabilitation programme so that the rich and irreplaceable legacy can be appropriately protected and restored in due course for present and future generations of New Zealanders and visitors.

ICOMOS supports the use of local and international disaster assessment and recovery guidelines, which provide guidance on immediate assessment and stabilization of the heritage structures, including:
- Conducting an initial inspection, securing unsafe areas, preventing access and not allowing any demolition or removal of structure/contents to take place.
- Protection of items which could be further damaged (weather, mould, etc.), looted, etc.
- Working with experienced conservation architects, engineers, conservators, NZHPT to develop and implement a rehabilitation plan.

ICOMOS extends its assistance through its network of volunteer international experts in heritage structures, and in particular its International Scientific Committee on Risk Preparedness (ICORP), who would like to contribute towards the successful and longer-term rehabilitation of Christchurch's iconic cultural heritage places which are intrinsic parts of the city's history, culture and identity.

Our best wishes for a safe recovery from this disaster.

Gustavo Araoz
President of ICOMOS

Copy to:
Christchurch City Council
New Zealand Historic Preservation Trust
Ministry of Culture and Heritage, the Department of Conservation
New Zealand Institute of Architects
New Zealand Association of Professional Conservators
Civil Defence Deconstruction Team
The Property Council of New Zealand
Insurance Council of New Zealand
IPENZ National Engineering Heritage Committee
Department of Building and Housing