

Report by the President of ICOMOS

Dear ICOMOS members,

I am pleased to present this short report to the Annual General Assembly of ICOMOS in 2018.

The new Board met four times after its election in Delhi in December 2017, once physically in Paris and three times virtually, covering five continents from Sydney to NYC. Task teams were newly created in accordance with the current needs of ICOMOS. Since ICOMOS is based on the voluntary work of members, it will take some time until the new Board identifies its appropriate working method. But I believe that the increase in the number of meetings has already enhanced the efficiency of our internal governance. The Secretariat remains small, but we have a new staff member who has been contributing to more efficient operations.

ICOMOS still needs more work to stabilize its financial situation. Under the current financial structure, a single incident such as a lawsuit could easily lead to insolvency. We need to secure new and sustainable income resources. On the other hand, no money comes without projects, but to create and run new projects, we need more people. This implies that the healthy financial structure of ICOMOS is intimately linked to many internal and external matters of ICOMOS. The Board should cope with these inter-related matters carefully, but swiftly.

I am excited to see that new National Committees are being created. And I am also pleased to welcome new leaders of some National Committees. I notice that a number of them are present here. The activities of each Committee is the key to the success of ICOMOS. I very much look forward to seeing new developments in these committees. Please do let us know what we could do for you to further develop your activities.

In this context, I would like to mention the fact that I have had the pleasure to support the work of the ICOMOS Working Group for Emerging Professionals. Together with Ms. Sheridan Burke, the president of the Advisory Committee, and Mr. Gideon Koren, the president of ICLAFI, I have been holding virtual meetings every month with ca. 20-25 people of the Working Group from all over the world. A tangible outcome of the work of this WG is reflected in the new model bylaws of the International Scientific Committees. We should continue to work with and for younger colleagues in order to more closely integrate them into the organizational structure as well as scientific work of ICOMOS.

When we shift our focus from the internal organization of ICOMOS to the outer world, I need to stress that the current environment of ICOMOS is not a quiet or stable one. The World Heritage matters, for instance, are becoming more complicated. Many more stakeholders are involved and want to get involved. ICOMOS members are expected to pay due attention to the integrity of ICOMOS as a whole, even in carrying out their individual works. A small or careless act has the potential to damage the organization fatally.

On a more positive note, I am very happy to report to you in the context of external relations that cooperation with two other advisory bodies, i.e., IUCN and ICCROM has been improving well. The nature-culture journey continues. Heritage Impact Assessments will be the second field. And I am confident that much more is to come from this collaboration. Such collaborative work is significant, especially under the current situation where the World Heritage process has been heavily politicized. As such, closer cooperation between the three Advisory bodies will substantially enhance the scientific credibility of the whole World Heritage system.

Another exciting collaboration may start soon with African colleagues, inter alia with the African

World Heritage Fund. ICOMOS was invited to the annual meeting of the Fund in Ethiopia. I had a pleasure to send my video message to congratulate them on the initiative to hold a meeting of African academics from francophone countries in the field of heritage, which took place in Saint-Louis in Senegal just a month ago. I expect more collaborative works to be carried out in conjunction with them.

One final important project with another organization that should be mentioned here is the project to set up quality standards commissioned by the EU, in the framework of the European Year of Cultural Heritage. I am delighted to see that ICOMOS is invited to participate in this important initiative.

ICOMOS is famous for certain people, but it is not yet known to many people. We should ask ourselves why this is so and what we might do to change the current situation. This question is crucial to inviting more members and to sustain us in our most important work.

We live in a world where people increasingly gain their knowledge from Wikipedia, images from Instagram, and meet “virtually” by sharing a “desktop.” ICOMOS should revisit and reconfirm its mandate and functions in the context of the rapidly-evolving 21st century. The Board organized a workshop on these crucial issues and will continue to work on them. In any case, I personally believe that the quality of this work matters.

I express my sincere gratitude to all those who worked for ICOMOS and their great contributions.

I do hope that I can report even more positive things in 2019.

Toshiyuki Kono
President of ICOMOS