# PRESS RELEASE

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# ICOMOS releases “Future of Our Pasts” report to increase

# engagement of cultural heritage in climate action

BAKU, Republic of Azerbaijan, 3 Jul – Cultural heritage offers immense and virtually untapped potential to drive climate action and support ethical and equitable transitions by communities towards low carbon, climate resilient development pathways. Realizing that potential, however, requires both better recognition of the cultural dimensions of climate change and adjusting the aims and methodologies of heritage practice.

Limiting global warming to 1.5ºC would require “rapid and far-reaching” transitions in land, energy, industry, buildings, transport, and cities, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has said. Better addressing the ways in which cultural heritage is both impacted by climate change and a source of resilience for communities would increase the ambition for --- and effectiveness of --transformative change, the ICOMOS report released Wednesday concluded.

The “Future of Our Pasts: Engaging Cultural Heritage in Climate Action” report was released by ICOMOS on Wednesday in Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan at an event held during the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee.

“With almost 100 contributions and reviews from experts from Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, North and South America representing natural and social sciences, heritage professionals and climate scientists and climate policy-makers, this important new report testifies to the breadth and policy relevance of cultural heritage to climate change” said Dr. Ishanlosen Odiaua of ICOMOS Nigeria, one of the report’s Lead Authors.

Twenty-eight lead and contributing authors from 19 countries prepared the report on behalf of the ICOMOS Climate Change and Heritage Working Group (CCHWG) to further the mobilization of the cultural heritage community to help meet the challenge of climate change.

“One of the messages that comes out very strongly in the report is that there are significant cultural heritage dimensions to every aspect of climate action covered by the Paris Agreement, including heightening ambition to address climate change, mitigating greenhouse gases, enhancing adaptive capacity, and planning for loss and damage,” said Andrew Potts, ICOMOS CCHWG Coordinator.

The report highlights a number of ways in which the core considerations of cultural heritage intersect with the ambitions of the Paris Agreement. For instance, historic and existing buildings represent an important source of embodied carbon and their reuse is a key strategy in many regions for avoiding future emissions associated with new building construction. Cultural heritage supports climate adaptation in a variety of ways, including learning from past social adaptability to environmental change and leveraging pride of place and social values to guide contemporary resilience planning.

Climate change is already impacting communities and heritage globally, and these trends are rapidly worsening. The report provides a framework for systematically cataloguing the impacts of climate change drivers on six main categories of cultural heritage, in order to aid in evaluating and managing both climate risks to cultural heritage and the positive role it can play as a source of resilience.

“No community, culture, region or type of heritage is immune from climate risks. Climate change impacts from sea level rise and coastal flooding to drought and extreme heat, will sorely test the adaptive capacity of diverse cultural systems,” said Adam Markham of the Union of Concerned Scientists, one of the Lead Authors.

Given the nature and scale of climate impacts, the report concludes that how we conceive of heritage and how we manage it will require updating. New, multi-disciplinary approaches will be required in areas such as heritage documentation, disaster risk reduction, vulnerability assessment, conservation, education and training as well as in the ways heritage sites are presented to visitors.

“The climate is changing and so must heritage. It would be foolish to imagine the practice of heritage remaining static while the world goes through the rapid and far-reaching transitions discussed in the IPCC’s recent Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C,” said Professor Toshiyuku Kono, President of ICOMOS.

While the heritage community must intensify its climate action, so too must climate scientists and policy-makers responsible for implementing the Paris Agreement finally fully engage with culture and heritage. The report suggests steps to build bridges between cultural heritage practice and climate science, including strengthening involvement by cultural heritage experts in the work of the IPCC.

“What climate science tells us is that adaptation and mitigation are necessary. What climate science cannot tell us is what adaptation options are most workable within any given human system. Cultural heritage is a source of creativity and inspiration that can answer this,” said Dr. Marcy Rockman, a report Lead Author and ICOMOS’s IPCC Engagement Lead.

The report is designed to provide a benchmark against which the heritage community may measure their work on climate change as well as a tool for climate policy-makers to increase their engagement with the culture field. Another aim is to encourage gap-filling research.

This “vision document is also designed to help create bridges and cooperation between experts and decision makers involved in the sectors of heritage, culture, sustainability, climate science and climate action and to inspire and stimulate new approaches,” wrote Dr. Valérie Masson-Delmotte, co-chair of IPCC Working Group I, in a preface to the report.

The report was prepared under the scientific leadership of ICOMOS’s Climate Change and Heritage Working Group. ICOMOS initially plans to use the report to organize its inputs into a proposed update of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee’s 2007 Policy Document on the Impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage sites, to develop a roadmap for heritage organisations to engage on climate change issues, and to organise outreach to the scientific community on research gaps and opportunities.

Digital copies of *Future of Our Pasts: Engaging cultural heritage in climate action, an Outline of Climate Change and Cultural Heritage* is available at:

<https://indd.adobe.com/view/a9a551e3-3b23-4127-99fd-a7a80d91a29e> .

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# What is ICOMOS?

ICOMOS (the International Council on Monuments and Sites) is a non-governmental international organisation dedicated to the conservation of the world's monuments and sites. ICOMOS operates through a network of experts that benefits from the interdisciplinary exchange of its members, among which are architects, historians, archaeologists, art historians, geographers, anthropologists, engineers and town planners. ICOMOS is active in over 100 countries and operates 28 different international scientific committees.

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