

«A PREDECESSOR OF ICOMOS IN THE 1930'S?»

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ICOMOS was established in 1965, but the idea of creating an international organization to care for the world's monuments was first put into practice some 30 years before. It was called the International Committee on Historic Monuments (CIMH) and was set up in 1933 by the International Museums Office, which was an autonomous service within the League of Nations. The CIMH was created in order to fulfill the missions entrusted to the International Museums Office by the 1931 Athens Conference, missions which are written on the famous «Athens Charter on the Restoration of Monuments». The programme of the Committee was published in 1934 and stated that its duty was:

- «to coordinate the efforts undertaken in each country to conserve the evidences of the past;
- (...) to provoke the creation of organizations dedicated to such works in countries where they do not exist;
- to promote the exchanges of points of view, of documents or technicians;
- to constitute an international documentation for the profit of all;
- to study the problems presented by any administration;
- and to develop the public's respect for monuments and the spirit of international solidarity.»

These objectives are similar to those ICOMOS would later adopt. Two similarities between the two organizations are particularly interesting, both were established following an international Congress each producing a landmark Charter (Athens 1931, Venice 1964) and both were linked to the concept of world heritage. In fact, forty years before the

World Heritage Convention, on 10 October 1932, in the sequence of the Athens Conference, the Assembly of the League of Nations issued Recommendations to the member States, which consider the conservation of the heritage of humankind to be of interest to the community of States. This is one of the earliest references to the concept of world heritage ever to be presented by an international organization. The CIMH was formed in this spirit of international co-operation shortly after these Recommendations were made and ICOMOS is one of the institutional members of the World Heritage Committee.

Nevertheless, unlike ICOMOS which is an independent organization, the Committee was an intergovernmental institution. By 1935 already twenty-five countries had designated their representative to the CIMH, but because of its intergovernmental status, it was dependent on each country's contribution. Unfortunately, the financial and political constraints of the time prevented an effective action and at the beginning of the World War II the work of the Committee, as well as that of the League of Nations, came to an end.

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