

Report by the President of ICOMOS

As you all know, this is my final report as your President, after having served you for nine years, plus prior to that, six more as a Vice President. In electing me to serve for this long period of time, I feel deeply honoured by the trust that you have placed in me to guide the organization and hopefully to inspire you to seek constantly to do better with loyalty and unwavering commitment. I have been fortunate to have been accompanied in this long journey by excellent Bureau and Board members and the Secretariat staff without whom none of the accomplishment of the last decade and a half would have been possible.

I also want to thank my colleagues in the general membership and the ICOMOS Academy for their efforts and intellectual support. Being so numerous, I cannot possibly name all who helped me along the way, but at least over the length of this report, I will try to bring out some of the names who gave me much more than I probably deserved.

Since most of the important information about the accomplishments of the past year will be covered by the reports of the Director General, the Secretary General and the Treasurer, I will focus this last address on the principal accomplishments that we have achieved during my tenure. To do this, I have organized my thoughts around three main pillars that always guided me in my goal to transform ICOMOS into a modern and strong organization able to meet the ever-growing and evolving needs of the world's cultural heritage: harmony, growth, and openness.

In terms of building a harmonious environment, after several terms of an internally pugnacious Executive Committee prior to the past three triennia, we have been blessed with a Board where candid and forward-looking discussions and mutual respect for consensus decisions prevailed. This was undoubtedly due to the requirement that all Board members must work, especially in the areas of their interest. In improving the Secretariat, the work of Secretary General Kirsti Kovanen was crucial, as was also the behind the scenes work of our Vice President Toshiyuki Kono, particularly in the appointment of Marie-Laure Lavenir as our Director General, who has brought harmony through vastly improved working conditions and fostering positive attitudes among our loyal staff. This is one of Marie-Laure's great achievements, especially in view of the several misguided previous efforts to solve the in-house tensions that had prevailed for a long time. In fact, I consider the very presence of Marie-Laure in the Secretariat one of the greatest accomplishments. As with all NGOs, the position of Director General provides us with the necessary continuity and a steady representation that transcends electoral Board changes.

Marie-Laure's success was greatly aided by a new governance policy that was developed under the guidance of Vice President Grellan Rourke, and that clearly defines the respective symbiotic responsibilities of the Board and the Director General, and provides a framework for our mutual relationship and respect. With this newly defined authority and her excellent management skills, the Director General re-structured the internal organization of our secretariat personnel and as a result, the individual efficiency and satisfaction of our staff has grown beyond our expectations.

The policy for institutional growth that goes beyond mere numbers and instead relies on enhanced professionalism and increased activities has proven very effective both internally and externally. Internally, and with the expert support of Vice President Gideon Koren and ICLAFI, our Legal Committee, ICOMOS has adopted a policy of withdrawing recognition from plutocratically restrictive or "ghost" national committees, and once having done so, it has successfully called for their re-organization under new statutes that meet our requirements for openness and democratic principles. The result has been the establishment of a real presence by ICOMOS in countries where it previously existed in name only. The fact that we will be holding a General Assembly in India is a direct result of this policy. At the same time, certain regions are active in organizing National Committees where none or very few exist, as is the case in the Eastern Caribbean.

Our International Scientific Committees, which constitute the other side of our work, have grown and continue to grow in ways that we unimaginable as few years ago. As with the National Committees, ISCs that remain restrictive in their membership, inactive or dormant for long periods of time are being weeded out. Our Scientific Council, now a statutory body, allows the ISCs to be

self-regulating by carefully tracking and correcting committees with problems such as restrictive membership policies, which in a few cases is a legacy from our founding days when ICOMOS operated as an “old boys’ club.” Over the course of my presidency I have had the honour to take part in many symposia convened by our ISCs all over the world. I have been especially awed by the professionalism, the power to convene talented members and the leadership of Rohit Jigyasu in Emergency Preparedness Committee; of Sheridan Burke and Fernando Espinosa de los Monteros in 20th Century Heritage; of Milagros Flores and Adriana Careaga in Fortifications and Military Heritage; of Susan Barr in Polar Heritage; of Monica Luengo in Cultural Landscapes; of Stefan Simon in Stone Conservation; of Mario Santana and Andreas Georgopoulos in Documentation; of Neil Silberman in Interpretation and Presentation; of Steve Kelley in Structures; and of Sofia Avgerinou Kolonias in Historic Towns and Villages. I am thankful to each of them for taking the time to make me aware of the priority issues and needs in their individual fields of specialization, and as a group, they are a primary component of the ICOMOS backbone and brain trust.

This new energy of our ISCs and NCs is reflected in the important workload, operations, and new structure of the Advisory Committee, which I have always thought of as the most important body of ICOMOS, since it is there that lies the power to activate and launch our full intellectual resources at the local, national, regional and global levels.

Externally, the presence and influence of ICOMOS has continued to expand thanks to the tenacity and intelligence of our many members who generously volunteer their talent and resources to advance the mission of ICOMOS. Particularly important in this respect was and is the work of Andrew Potts, Jyoti Hosagrahar, Jeff Soule and Ege Yildirim in our contributions to the development of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Habitat Programs. Equally important are our other MOUs with regional and international affinity organizations, such as ICCROM, ICOM, TICCIH, OVPM, the UIA, the Romualdo del Bianco Foundation, and of course, with the Google Arts and Culture initiative which will be showcased at our 19th General Assembly in New Delhi. Among these partners, I want to single out Paolo del Bianco for his dedication to the principles of conservation and his sustained generosity towards ICOMOS.

Despite our victories and achievements, the recent past has not been a happy one for the world’s cultural heritage. The destruction of cultural heritage has always been a companion of armed conflict, but with the advent of the social media and an increasingly pugnacious world, it has acquired new proportions by allowing the immediate global display of the horror of cultural destruction. ICOMOS has used the means available to us to keep the public informed about these events and to prepare for the recovery of these places. With generous support from the Arcadia Foundation in the UK, we helped train Syrian staff in the 3-D documentation of monuments at risk through Project Anqa in partnership with CyArk. With the continuous support of the German Federal Government, ICOMOS continued to publish *Heritage @ Risk*, a major instrument that periodically keeps the world informed about the forces that threaten the fragile cultural heritage of all countries. I must thank Christoph Machat and John Ziesimer for securing the funding and for managing and editing this publication.

Additional destruction has been caused this year by an apparently angry Mother Nature. Hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and forest fires have brought unprecedented damage to the heritage of Dominica, the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Mexico and the United States, and the resources for emergency responses have been depleted. It will take years to recover from these catastrophes.

Speaking of what lies ahead, I would like to share my failures by not having reached certain objectives that I considered crucial in transforming ICOMOS into an open, effective and democratic organization.

Realizing that our transformation was far from complete and would take years, I unsuccessfully tried to postpone the revision and adoption of new statutes at the General Assemblies in Paris and Florence so that eventually they could be drafted to reflect whatever new structure emerged from an in-depth study of emerging opportunities as well as our shortcomings. My inability to stop the statutes has to do with what I consider my first administrative failure, which is the continued existence of National Committees that are managed like medieval fiefdoms that exclude new members and new concepts. The old as well as the new statutes facilitate this by giving our National Committees an extraordinary autonomy that is often abused by their officers.

Another failure has been our inability to define a structure that would provide a strong and independent role for the universities, especially in countries where the National Committees inhibit or even openly avoid their participation in the work of ICOMOS. Thus, the brain trusts of universities remain untapped by ICOMOS, even when the universities have openly expressed their interest in taking part in our organizations without being subjected to the whims of National Committees.

The statutes also thwarted my objective of achieving a universal vote for all members, and do away with the legacy of our founders limiting the voting to 18 designated members of each National Committee, plus no votes at all for the ISCs in the general elections. This, of course, has to do with the fear to be dominated by the members of large National Committees, and it reflects the geopolitical structure that our founders copied from international inter-governmental organizations, a model based on politics that I have always considered inappropriate for ICOMOS. In fact, this structure permits the smallest of the continents to have effectively maintained dominance over the organization simply because unlike other continents it is composed of many small countries in close proximity to each other. Adopting the principle of universal vote would have required ICOMOS to develop a new structure that would allow for members within our own defined regions to formally organize their work while avoiding the dominance of any one region or group.

Another issue with the National Committees rests with the legacy of the remnants of colonial structures, which forces professional in certain territories to participate in ICOMOS through far away National Committees in France, Portugal, the Netherlands, the United States, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Spain, Chile and Ecuador whose principal work and concerns are geographically and conceptually far from theirs. Such is the case in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Guam, Taiwan, the Canaries, Curaçao, Tahiti, Samoa, Aruba, Montserrat, Greenland, St Barthelemy, Guadeloupe, Martinique, l'Île de la Reunion, St Pierre et Miquelon, the Azores, Bermuda, Madeira, the Turks and Caicos, the Cayman Islands, Easter Island, the Galapagos, Hawaii, Anguilla and the Falklands, to mention only a few of the areas excluded by ICOMOS from direct participation. And then, there is Antarctica, not a country but a de facto condominium managed by the states parties of the Antarctic Treaty System and whose heritage ICOMOS deals with through the Polar Heritage ISC, whose members possess no direct right to vote in our general elections.

To end my report, I would like to share some deep concerns about the tail-wagging-the dog effect on ICOMOS by the World Heritage Convention. It is true that the Convention has given ICOMOS great public visibility as well as the ability to promote good conservation, and in this area, Vice President Alfredo Conti played an essential beneficial role through his tenacity, diplomacy and knowledge. The Convention, however, has also created an unhealthy dependency on the World Heritage Centre whose priorities and needs are at times imposed on ICOMOS at the expense of our own priorities and needs. The most recent example was that ICOMOS agreed to be forced to accelerate our internal discussion on reconstruction to address the UNESCO priority on whether and how to rebuild the Bamiyan Buddhas.

I also want to warn ICOMOS about the shift in focus of the Convention itself away from its aim for international cooperation to preserve all the world's cultural resources as stated in its article 5. The Convention was born out of a period of great pessimism and fatalism about the ability of cultural heritage places to survive inspired largely by the floods in Venice and Florence, the Aswan Dam and relocations of Abu Simbel, the whole sale destruction of historic urban districts propelled by the MoMo urbanism and architecture, and the post-war illusion of a better modern world through science and technology. It seemed at the time that the major iconic monuments of the past were teetering on the edge of disappearance, and thus, the response of the Convention seems to have been to save only the best since we could not possibly save all heritage.

Thus, in a sort of synechdochic metamorphosis, the Convention became equivalent to the List; the List then became an exclusive roster of those high-profile properties that possess Outstanding Universal Value in each culture; and inclusion on the List became a commercial instrument for tourist promotion.

Over the last ten years, the pressure on the World Heritage Committee to inscribe at whatever cost has grown exponentially, often for sites in countries that do not have the ability to give them the proper protection. This is possible because the Convention places OUV above conservation. One

solution for this would be for ICOMOS to evaluate each country's status regarding the requirements of article 5, and to promote that only countries with the proven presence of protective systems should be able to nominate properties to the World Heritage List.

Finally, I want to end by thanking the Board of the French National Committee for securing the continuing support of the Secretariat and the wonderful new home for our headquarters. I also must thank Irina Bokova and Francesco Bandarin at UNESCO for their unwavering support for ICOMOS during our times of need, and the National Committees of China and Japan for also coming to the aid of ICOMOS when needed. I end with a deep expression of gratitude to my own National Committee, US/ICOMOS, for the logistics and spiritual support they have given to me over the last fifteen years in order to enable me to serve and represent ICOMOS all over the world. I could not have done it without them.

Gustavo F. Araoz
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