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Cultural Organization

Executive Board

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Item 11 of the provisional agenda

PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS

SUMMARY

Pursuant to 36 C/Resolution 46, requesting “the Director-General to conduct an assessment of the range of possible modalities for the protection and promotion of museums and collections in times of war and in times of peace”, and “to convene to that purpose a meeting of experts to assist her in the preparation of the above-mentioned assessment”, an experts’ meeting was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 11 to 14 July 2012 at the invitation and funding of the Brazilian Institute of Museums (IBRAM).

The present document summarizes the assessment of the experts’ meeting. On the basis of this assessment, the Executive Board is invited to examine whether the question of museums and collections should be regulated by a new standard-setting instrument.

Action expected of the Executive Board: proposed decision in paragraph 11.

Background

1. At the 36th session of the General Conference, Member States examined document 36 C/74, under item 5.16, on the protection and promotion of museums and collections and the desirability of a new legal instrument for museums which would acknowledge the role of museums to promote exchange and dialogue. The debate emphasized the importance of supporting capacities of museums and museum professionals in conservation, inventorying, documentation, presentation and security of cultural objects with a view to enhancing the recognition of their role for social inclusion, peace and development.

2. The debate further highlighted the role of museums in fostering an integrated approach to cultural heritage, and their capacity to enable various audiences across generations to rediscover their roots and approach other cultures. In this context the educational role of museums was strongly emphasized. Interventions by Member States also underscored the importance for museums to be able to protect their movable cultural objects which are particularly threatened by the illicit traffic due to their value both as commercial goods and as components of cultural identity.

3. Following the debate, the General Conference requested by its 36 C/Resolution 46 the Director-General to conduct an assessment of the range of possible modalities for the protection and promotion of museums and collections in times of war and in times of peace on the basis of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property. It also invited the Director-General to convene a meeting of experts, in consultation with the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and to submit that assessment to the Executive Board for examination at its 190th session.

4. In parallel to this reflection, UNESCO held the Second Meeting of the Parties to the 1970 Convention (20-21 June 2012) which decided to establish two institutional mechanisms, respectively: (i) a meeting of States Parties to the Convention every two years and (ii) the creation of an 18-member Subsidiary Committee of the Meeting of the States Parties to be convened by the Secretariat every year with a view to adopt operational guidelines to enhance the implementation of the 1970 Convention in all its dimensions.

Assessment of the International Experts

5. From 11 to 14 July 2012, a category VI international experts meeting was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This meeting was co-organized by UNESCO and IBRAM in consultation with ICOM, and brought together experts and observers representing museums, museum associations and foundations, cultural ministries, international organizations, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations from all geographic regions. Participants noted the increasing number and types of museums being created around the world and the evolving role of museums as public forums for promoting cross-cultural dialogue, peace building and social reconstruction as well as raising awareness about environmental, social, health, and economic issues. Moreover the contribution and potential of museums as economic drivers generating cultural tourism and employment is widely recognized. These changing roles have opened up new frontiers for museums.

6. The experts also noted the lack of adequate human, technical, legal and financial resources to protect museums and collections from the various challenges generated by the new role of museums as well as the increase in human-made and natural disasters placing heritage at risk and the alarming threat represented by illicit trafficking in cultural property.

7. The experts underlined the urgent need to ensure the technical and human resources that are essential to the conservation and security of museums and their collections, and to build capacities to adapt to new technology and modernize museum systems for conservation of collections and educational outreach.

8. The experts considered that the existing UNESCO conventions and recommendations in the field of culture that contain provisions concerning museums and collections do not sufficiently address needs in terms of protection and promotion of museums and collections and that existing legal frameworks do not adequately reflect the new dimensions of museums, particularly their educational and social functions.

9. It was acknowledged that UNESCO, as the only United Nations agency with a specific mandate in the field of culture and a global forum for multilateral collaboration, is uniquely positioned to establish the legal and policy standards for reinforcing the protection and promotion of museums and collections worldwide. The experts considered that a new legal instrument could incite governments to develop, adopt or strengthen their policies and legislations in order to respond to the new challenges and needs of museums in the twenty-first century, addressing issues such as sustainable development, non-formal education, social transformation and community engagement, human resources, information technology, risk mitigation and security measures.

10. Furthermore, the experts noted that a new instrument would foster and develop international cooperation mechanisms for the protection and promotion of museums and collections.

Proposed decision

11. In light of the above, the Executive Board may wish to consider the following decision:

The Executive Board,

1. Recalling 36 C/Resolution 46,
2. Taking into consideration the results of the Expert Meeting on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 11 to 14 July 2012, and thanking the Government of Brazil for hosting and financing that meeting,
3. Acknowledging the “assessment of the range of possible modalities for the protection and promotion of museums and collections in times of war and in times of peace on the basis of the 1954 Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property”, including relevant Recommendations,
4. Reiterating its conviction that in a rapidly changing world, UNESCO should play a leading international role in articulating principles and guidelines to support Member States in strengthening their museums and collections,
5. Also acknowledging the evolving role of museums as agents of inclusion, social transformation, and cross-cultural dialogue,
6. Requests the Director-General to strengthen UNESCO’s action for the protection of cultural objects and the sharing of best practices among museums to strengthen capacity-building for museums and museum professionals in conservation, inventorying, documentation, presentation and security of cultural objects with a view to enhancing the recognition of their role in favour of social inclusion, peace and development;
7. Invites the Director-General to conduct further consultations, in close cooperation with Member States, on the desirability of a new legal instrument on the protection and promotion of museums and collections and to report thereon to the Executive Board at its 191st session.



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ADDENDUM

1. The final conclusions and recommendations adopted by the Expert Meeting on the Protection and Promotion of Museums and Collections, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 11 to 14 July 2012 are accessible online at:

English: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/pdf/eo/en.pdf>

French: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/pdf/eo/fr.pdf>

Spanish: <http://www.unesco.org/culture/pdf/eo/es.pdf>

2. The final conclusions and recommendations will be circulated in the meeting room at the time of the discussion in the available languages.