

Address by Emmanuel Nnakenyi Arinze, Nigeria President, Commonwealth Association of Museums

Triennial Conference
Bridgetown, Barbados, May 5–12, 1999

Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the name of the members of the Commonwealth Association of Museums, I welcome you all to CAM '99, our Triennial Conference being held here in Bridgetown, Barbados. We are happy that we are meeting in this region of the Commonwealth for the first time in our history. Significantly, our last Triennial was held in Botswana; again that was the first time our Association met in Africa.

Hopefully, I look forward to our next Triennial being held in another region as we continue to reach out to museums in the Commonwealth.

The choice of our theme for this conference is unique and significant: *Museums, Peace, Democracy and Governance in the 21st Century*. Our aim is to take museums beyond their traditional terrain, and our choice of theme is informed by the fact that museums can no longer continue to remain silent on such critical issues that have become ever more central to the very survival of humanity as we enter the 21st century. In addition, we hold the view that museums can no longer continue to be satisfied staying on the fringes in our various countries. In the millennium they should be at the core of national issues and be recognized as institutions that have the special capacity to encourage and promote peace, democracy and good governance in the nation.

In the last one hundred years, the world has experienced two devastating world wars and numerous conflicts and smaller wars that have claimed millions of lives and caused the destruction of communities globally. Within the period, dictatorships that brutalized and humiliated human dignity flourished and peace tended to elude the majority of people around the world. How have museums responded to these situations and how did they survive even when they themselves became victims?

Certainly, the world needs peace, and humanity will be happier in a situation where there is peace and where people are allowed to become part of the machinery of governance.

For museums to contribute to the attainment of this goal, they have to become part of the problem-solving institutions in the 21st century. To do this, they will have to put the events of the 20th century together and use them to reach the conscience of the world in a positive way; they will have to foster the gains and the goodness of Peace, Democracy and Good Governance and, at the same time, use their resources to dramatize the horrors and pains of wars, and conflicts around the world.

I charge this conference to address these issues critically and evolve an Action Plan for Museums in the 21st century on how they (museums) can use their special potential and resources to promote global peace, good and effective governance and true democracy, for I believe that these central issues will become of major concern in the next century. The people of the world will clamour for and demand peace; they will embrace democracy and will stand for nothing short of good governance, and, so museums must be seen as inspiring agents of society for the promotion of these ideals.

Let me at this juncture pay tribute to the founding fathers of the Commonwealth Association of Museums as we celebrate our 25th anniversary. I salute their courage, their vision and their foresight. I thank them for making it possible for our museums in the Commonwealth to enjoy and benefit from their dreams of yesterday.

Very vividly, I remember the group that met in one of the conference rooms in Copenhagen during **ICOM '74**, where the resolution was put and adopted to formally establish **CAM**. As a young museum curator then, I was privileged to be in the company of these museum icons when the decision was taken to establish CAM. I count myself lucky to be here today as the President of CAM to tell this story and bow in respect to the museum giants who started this long trek 25 years ago.

Today, we are lucky to have among us in this hall, two key members of that core group who worked so hard to ensure the formation of CAM: Duncan Cameron of Canada and Reg Varney of the United Kingdom! They have continued to wax stronger in their commitment and service to CAM and we have continued to benefit from their wisdom and wealth of experience and expertise, immensely. As President of CAM and on behalf of the Executive Council and all our members, I salute Duncan and Reg for steadfastly keeping faith with CAM for the last 25 years. God bless you two abundantly.

CAM started as a small Association with very few members 25 years ago. Happily, today I am proud to say that CAM has been transformed into a solid international museums association that can no longer be ignored or unnoticed in the world comity of museums.

Today, we have membership in over thirty countries of the Commonwealth; today we have very close professional relationships with international organisations of similar interests and goals. We now have two eminent citizens of the Commonwealth as our Patrons: former President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, and Sir Shridath Ramphal, former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. Furthermore, we have created the CAM `Cowrie Circle' to honour and pay tribute to those who have contributed to the development and growth of museums in the Commonwealth. The Cowrie Circle, I believe, will inspire young museum professionals to aspire to excellence through hard work and dedication to the course of museums in their countries, the Commonwealth and the world.

Today, we run a very successful and effective international Distance Learning Programme in basic Museum Studies. We are the only museum organisation that runs such a programme in the Commonwealth. We are proud of these achievements.

I thank our funders who have continued to support our various activities. Specifically, I thank the Commonwealth Foundation that has remained our main funder over the years. We are indeed grateful to the Foundation and the Director for their solid support and encouragement. We are also grateful to Leventis Foundation, the Getty Grant Program, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Canadian Museums Association and the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade of the Government of Canada, and many others for their continued support.

Looking back to the very beginning, I can say with satisfaction that in its twenty-five years of existence, in spite of initial trying problems, CAM has gone a long way and has certainly taken great strides that will be recognized when the history of museums will be written.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I invite you to join us all in the Association in celebrating our 25th Anniversary and in launching CAM into the 21st century. I wish our Conference resounding success.

Thank you and God Bless.