

Introduction to the Theme: Museums, Peace, Democracy and Governance in the 21st Century

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When we decided to pursue the theme of Museums, Peace, Democracy and Governance in the 21st Century, it was necessary to begin to think about how to describe the programme and how to shape it. The theme is one not common in museums and it takes the museum way beyond the traditional boundaries into the "heart of the matter" and into uncharted and unknown territory. It takes the museum from its preoccupation with the past to the issues which are vital to the survival of humanity in the present and from the quiet edge to the centre of the mainstream.

When I began to speak to people of the programme, some had already considered this theme (including many of you here), some had no idea how it could relate to museums and some were able to appreciate it after I explained it as part of the contemporary museum's effort to be relevant to the needs of its communities and its societies. Many too could not get beyond the idea that by the very act of preserving cultural heritage, we somehow automatically addressed the questions of promoting peace, democracy and governance. In this conference, we wish to directly examine how museums promote peace, democracy and good governance and how museums can explicitly support these values through some of the sustaining conditions which indirectly help to promote peace and democracy.

In thinking about these responses, it became very apparent that there is not a common understanding of why museums could or should consider these issues and how. The conditions relating to peace and democracy around the Commonwealth are vastly different in different countries. Some of us have never experienced war or severe civil unrest directly even though we abhor the news of atrocities and human suffering elsewhere. Others have been and are faced with war or highly volatile civil conditions. From current and recent events we are well aware too that monuments, historic buildings, museums and other institutions of cultural heritage such as libraries and archives often are either specific targets for war because of their significance in national identity and cultural memory or, inevitably damaged because of their proximity to more militarily important locations.

Again, some museums exist in well and long established democracies with institutions of good governance which have existed in similar form for centuries. Others have faced the dismantling of traditional forms of decision-making and governance (often democratic) and their replacement by fragile, corrupt or completely inadequate political structures which must be altered or extremely carefully and wisely nurtured to become strong, stable political structures.

A primary question that museums must consider even before they decide what they can do,

is whether museums, which are usually inventions of those in power either because they have been created by social groups with money and influence or because they are direct departments of the government, can publicly explore these issues in their countries without a great deal of controversy if not direct threat to their existence. Two speakers will consider this question directly and it will arise throughout as we hear of specific examples of museums and conflict.

When we come to the next question of how we begin to do this we come up against the need to determine what we mean by peace, democracy and good governance and all that those ideas involve. I want to quickly read a couple of definitions to illustrate how we begin to add different ideas into our conceptions.

- 1) Oxford Encyclopaedic English Dictionary 1991
- 2) American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language

PEACE

- 1) - quiet, tranquillity
 - freedom from or the cessation of war
 - freedom from civil disordermake peace: bring about peace, reconcile

- 2) - the absence of war or other hostilities
 - an agreement or treaty to end hostilities
 - freedom from quarrels and disagreement, harmonious relations
 - public security, law and order
 - calm, serenity, etc

DEMOCRACY

- 1) - a system of government by the whole population, usually through elected representatives
 - a classless and tolerant form of society
- 2) - government by the people, exercised directly or through elected representatives
 - a political or social unit based upon this form of rule
 - a social condition based on equality and respect for the individual within the community

GOVERNANCE

- 1)- the act or manner of governing
 - the office or function of governing
 - 2)- the act, process or power of governing
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- 1) to govern:
 - rule or control with authority
 - conduct the policy and affairs of
 - influence or determine

- be a standard or principle for
- constitute a law for

2) to govern:

- to control the actions or behaviour of; guide; direct
- to make and administer public policy for
- to exercise political authority

National Endowment for Democracy (United States - Founding Statement of Principles, 1984)

Democracy involves the right of the people freely to determine their own destiny. The exercise of this right requires a system that guarantees freedom of expression, belief and association, free and competitive elections, respect for the inalienable rights of individuals and minorities, free communications media and the rule of law

Our ideas and definitions may be understood in the most direct form but what that means in practice and under different conditions cannot be easily determined. Peace can be the cessation of war or an inclusive and rewarding society. Democracy can be everything from a form of consensus, to a representative parliament based on a multi-party system or a one-party system. Governance can be everything from corrupt self-serving and self-centred elite to ethical, public-centred and well-structured integration of public institutions and governance practices in co-operation with other private and non-governmental organizations. We will have the opportunity to hear from those most directly involved how these ideas play out in practice in different nations of the Commonwealth.

What of "peaceful and democratic" countries? When many of us have no control over external matters why should we even think about such issues?

Canada is a good example, I think. I have said that I was not aware of any effort on the part of Canadian museums to deal with Quebec/ Canada relations in our museums. This topic has been a fundamental debate in Canada for many years and the direct question of the separation of Quebec from Canada, a serious national issue on several occasions as well as an ongoing one. While not normally involving violence and civil unrest, there have been times when violence has erupted. Similarly, aboriginal rights have on several occasions in recent years involved armed confrontation. I am not aware of any museums who have dealt directly with the history and issues involved in land claims even though they have the materials and resources to do so. In a conversation last night I did learn that an interesting exhibition had been prepared at the McCord Museum in Montreal which compared the work of an English Canadian political cartoonist and a French Canadian political cartoonist in such a way that shed light on this topic.

I am sure that there are other examples elsewhere of museums ignoring important concerns

but for issues of this magnitude, it is often all too easy to look outside our own situation and see the major conflicts and problems of others and ignore the seeds of strife which exist in our own countries. Museums can no longer do that if they are to mean anything in the public dialogues and contemporary life of our countries or regions.

Among other things, all of us must pay attention to the sustaining conditions for peace, democracy and good governance. The relationship between these three, I'm sure will become clearer as we proceed through the conference. At this point it is only important to say that they are closely intertwined and many believe that democracy and good governance are the best chance of maintaining peace. There are factors within society, as illustrated by the NED idea of democracy that are not necessarily inherent in the definition of democracy, which can be strong contributing factors to sustainable peace beyond strict definitions. What are the conditions for peace and democracy?

In general, we must include in our broadest consideration of sustaining conditions, human rights, the consideration of cultural equity and pluralism, cultural rights, the rights of women and children, the right to work according to one's skills and abilities for economic independence, the rule of law, the strong presence and sound structure of the educational system, the strength and vitality of grass roots initiatives and non-governmental structures, the alleviation of poverty and the disparity between rich and poor, and a caring society. Not least in our considerations must be the constant, unwavering and urgent concern for sustainable development to enable us to maintain the environment of the earth so that our resources will maintain us and not become the bone that the dogs fight over.

Many of these conditions will emerge strongly in the discussions we have but through the consideration of our primary theme of museums, peace, democracy and governance.

DESIRED OUTCOMES OF THE MEETING:

- A better understanding by museum professionals of how museums can play a leading role in the promotion and understanding of sustainable peace, democracy and good governance
- Specific study and discussion of methods and examples of how to use collections and develop programs and exhibitions to call attention to the ideas of peace and democracy and help the public and communities to understand their nature and importance and to contribute to a friendly environment for peace and democracy, human rights, tolerance and understanding
- A visionary statement and general action plan
- A comprehensive report of the proceedings
- A stronger role for Commonwealth museums in the cultural, educational, social and economic life of the community and society in contributing to the creation of supporting conditions for peace and democracy
- Collaboration of museums with other NGOs, government and other allies such as women and children, to inform and educate the public about peace, democracy and honest

governance and its sustaining conditions such as: rich and respectful cultural diversity and pluralism, human rights including those of women, children and first peoples, sustainable development, and alleviation of poverty and the disparity between rich and poor

PLAN OF THE MEETING

- small group discussion and work
- statement of principles and action plan
- not just papers, not just workshop but practical steps forward to what museums can do and what CAM might do

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS IN THINKING ABOUT PRINCIPLES AND ACTIONS

1. Why should museums be concerned about peace, democracy and good governance?
2. What are the problems encountered in promoting peace, democracy and good governance?
3. Can museums do it?
4. What do you mean by peace? What are the enabling conditions of peace?
 - a) How can museums promote peace in divided societies?
By what methods can museums promote peace?
 - b) How can museums promote peace in "peaceful nations"?
By what methods can museums promote peace in peaceful nations?
5. What are the enabling conditions of democracy and good governance? What do we mean by good governance?
 - a) How can museums promote them?
By what methods
6. What steps should Commonwealth museums take to promote peace, democracy and good governance?

What steps should CAM take to promote peace, democracy and good governance?

RESULT OF DISCUSSIONS: STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES AND FOCUSED ACTION PLAN FOR MUSEUMS & FOR CAM

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Theme Introduction