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**Address by the  
President of the General Conference  
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**on the occasion of the Triennial Conference of  
the Commonwealth Association of Museums  
"Culture, Economy, Climate Change  
and Youth"**

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## **Introduction**

First of all I would wish to express my gratitude to the organizers of the Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM) in conjunction with the Asian civilization of Museums (ACM) for the singular honour to address this august assembly.

I am doubly honoured to be asked to share some thoughts with you, the experts in the area of museums. I recently read a statement at St Telmo Museum in San Sebastian, Spain, that said "The Museum is an agent of sustainable development through an educative and cultural offer which serves to feed the curiosity, teach tolerance, and help the aspiration of a shared future and at the same time create real economic opportunity in the society.

This subject covers a very wide area of concepts and in order to treat some of the issues in a more detailed fashion, I have decided to put my thoughts into compartments, if you wish.

- a. Museums, Culture and Economy
- b. Elements for Museums and Youth
- c. Transition Youth – Climate Change

- d. Elements for Climate Change
- e. Small Islands Developing States and Climate Change
- f. Museums of Natural History and Climate Change

Distinguished Delegates:

We are here to address the theme of the Conference: Culture, Economy and Climate Change and Youth, a complex combination of apparently diverse subjects. What might be seen as a hazardous combination of subjects is indeed an insightful perception that may lead our societies to a new path for development.

### **Museums, Culture and Economy**

Although museums' core missions of conserving and researching are key to ensure the continuity of cultures based on artifacts material integrity, museums operate today in a context of a radical remapping of the cultural field in member states policies. New ideas about culture and society inspire and lead new policy initiatives. The growing international recognition of the centrality of culture in all human activities or, to put it bluntly, the power of culture, have imposed additional challenges and missions to museums. Some authors have therefore called for a "post-museum", a neologism that could capture the revamped role of museum for the future.

The reterritorialisation of culture emphasizes new scales of action for museums at the level of community – both social and cultural – of the nation and country, of the region and the world. Cultural identity is therefore perceived at different scales. This evolution is not only due to globalization but also to a changing perception of the complexity of cultural phenomena. It further provides regional and international professional organizations, such as the Commonwealth Association for museums, with enhanced legitimacy to

keep proving that commitment to culture is crucial to reshape our societies for a better future.

Museums and other cultural organizations operate today in an environment that is saturated by data while, at the same time, they face demands to account for the expenditure of public funds. An utilitarian perspective has positioned the "museum industry" as subject to economic analysis and accountability. Purpose and performance of museums have consequently been scrutinized and criticized. A large part of museum grey literature has focused on demonstrating museum economic value.

In some countries, such as France, public policies nowadays operate with assumption that museums are economically significant in addition to their unique role in the preservation of cultures. Most recent statistics show that 30% of the population is museum-goers and ready to pay to access cultural heritage in museums. The French economist Françoise Benhamou pointed out that free access to culture is not democratization of culture. However a sophisticated economic theory of culture might be resourceful. While it will neither encapsulate nor resume the elevating role of museum, "you can close our museums but you cannot take our dreams" to quote an out-of-work museum professional.

If we want to work for a dramatically changed future, other assumptions such as understanding and recognition of museums, central social role, and scientific and ethical responsibility are more important than their economic value *per se*.

Where do museums stand when we address the issue of culture and development?

Social psychologists have reassessed the definition of development in terms of progress toward more responsible participation in specific communities of

practice, rather than assuming that development is a generic process independent of the goals and institutions of communities in which the individual develops. As museums have reshaped themselves for contemporary times, the dynamic character of the relationship between museums and their audiences has been acknowledged and their educational purposes have become prioritized to foster their social value. Their educational provision has therefore increased.

Museums shape knowledge and educate. They democratize culture and help to think the present historically. They provide us with a sense of beauty, not in terms of aesthetic achievements we used to associate with cultural heritage, but in terms of the personal inner accomplishment.

*New eyes*

*The real voyage of discoveries consist not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes*

For me, the meaning of this quote from Marcel Proust is that what is perceived as threats and global challenges can be turned into opportunities for a new voyage in our humanity and new discoveries of its talents.

I therefore would like us to have new eyes when looking today at the museums' role to respond to the two major issues brought to our reflection: the building of a sustainable future for Youth and the action around Climate Change.

A Tibetan saying echoes the French writer metaphoric invitation: "If you want to know your future, look at what you are doing in this moment".

## **Elements for Museums and Youth**

*Youth, migration, urbanization and education*

Migration is an essential element in the world economy. It redistributes wealth at the world level and plays a central role in development and poverty reduction. International migration is also one of the major moral and political challenges of our time, as stated in a recent UNESCO publication. In 2007, 28 % of the labor force in Singapore was migrants, while according to some researchers, South Africa as a whole is nowadays “a region on the move”. At the same time, and among other components that define globalization, the growing cross national integration has consequences on the development of cities. Cities are where half of us now live. By 2030 there will be five billion people living in cities, according to UN Habitat reports. Migrants most of the time gravitate to urban cities, to contemporary megalopolis that offer hopes of job opportunities, but also hopes to join migrants cultural communities for solidarity. Indeed through migration, urban cities have a remarkably diverse multicultural population and migrants are considered among the forces contributing to the understanding of the world as shaped by something else than just territorialized spaces.

If it is common sense to say that globalization has fostered migration and urbanization, it is unfortunately also true to say that independent migration of children to cities has emerged as a specific phenomenon all over the world. In Europe, only one country, Germany, was concerned in the sixties by cases of children migrating alone; in the 2000's, almost all E.U. countries are concerned. Youth share in issues such as immigration and urbanization is important. The fact that migrant children are considered as migrants and not as children, automatically lowers their legal protection. Children and young people are more exposed to exploitation or abuse, and increasing vulnerability.

Umberto Eco, in his essay “Migration, Tolerance and the Intolerable” pointed out that migrations are destined to transform radically the social and cultural characteristics of the places involved. He also reminds us how the migration

of minors and young people should be seen as an integrated part of broader migratory flows and deep social and geopolitical change encompassing them. On the one hand, considering these fundamental changes, some authors have argued that minors and young people who leave their country should be considered as “social innovators”. However, on the other hand, some authors have acknowledged that the context of arrival is rarely able to meet the need for effective, educational and economic support of minors and young migrants.

Migrant children being treated first and foremost as children means that they should have access to education, formal and informal, in countries of destination.

Ellsworth Huntington said “History in its broadest aspect is a record of man's migrations from one environment to another.”

This is where post-museum’s mission stands.

Culture in the case of migrant young people is the only lasting bond with their community of origin, their roots, their social networks and ultimately with the possibility to access education and learning.

In the last fifteen years, much has changed with the need to theorize learning and culture, and consequently the need to move towards a cultural theory of learning. Museums have been among the very unique cultural institutions that have attempted to conceptualize learning in a post-modern way as a basic human attribute. Therefore, museums have also moved to develop methodologies to measure outcomes and impact of learning with the research stake-holders.

Museum education philosophies have been inspired by child-centered teaching-philosophies and discovery-learning strategies. Learning in museums is potentially more open-ended, more individually directed, more

susceptible to multiple diverse responses matching pluricultural contemporary societies, compared to formal education where what is taught is directed by externally established standards. In the UK in 1963, 34 museums education services were registered. In 1983, it rose to 154 with 362 specialist education posts. In 2006, 1,171 education posts were registered in museums and more than 80% of English museums were used for formal and informal education. Government practices in the UK have insisted that education in museums should be centrally positioned.

Museums have the power to position themselves as key sites for learning in post-modernity. They have started to do so. Their educational role towards most vulnerable people and youth in particular must be museums guiding light for the decades to come.

Enjoyment, inspiration and creativity emerge as the most highly valued outcome of museum-based learning. Museums' visit inspires youth, educates them and gives them a sense of history. For without a sense of the past in the present, cultural continuity cannot be ensured in the future.

We know how science is resourceful. Do we know how youth, as future researchers, future decision-makers, future artists, future thinkers can be resourceful in shaping their own sustainable future?

We must invest in Youth and trust its creative capacity, offer them spaces of learning, expression and action.

We should also move from the approach of a future conceived by us for them, as inheriting, to a future conceived for them with them.

### **Transition Youth – Climate Change**

The value of museum to access art and history is unquestioned. Is this the same for science?

Sensitivity and receptiveness to culture is linked to sensitivity and receptiveness to environment. The distinction between culture and nature must, like with other dualities to which it belongs, be abandoned. Culture is not a parallel universe somewhere in our mind which can be used to calibrate our experience of the material world.

It is with reference to this major turn in science and philosophy that I would like to consider the issue of the conservation of cultures facing climate change.

One aspect of the global challenge of climate change for cultural heritage is indeed the threat to its conservation and how we deal with its protection to maintain its sustainability. But the challenge of climate change goes beyond the threats to material culture and its physicality. The higher and broader challenge is the change in our behaviors and in our relationship with our environment. To address it calls on our capacity to put into practice with new eyes, with new behaviors, and with new policies, the way we live together on Earth.

Responding to climate change requires thus a new profound engagement.

Allow me to paraphrase the first lines of the great novelist Virginia Woolf's book *To the Lighthouse*, to suggest that this engagement is not an additional burden in difficult times: this expedition is bound to take place and the wonder to which we had all looked forward, for years and years it seemed, is, after a night's darkness and a day's sail, within touch.

## **Elements for Climate Change**

Climate change is an environmental, cultural and political phenomenon that is reshaping the way we think about ourselves, our societies and humanity's place on Earth. Climate change impacts on our common future, not only because we will face different immediate physical threats, such as the rising

of sea level, but more importantly because it will directly impact the biodiversity and its current conditions of conservation.

### **Small Islands Developing States and Climate Change**

The 51 small islands developing states (SIDS) are a unique example on Earth of geographical and cultural diversity. SIDS are located across the Indian, Pacific, and Atlantic Ocean and in the Caribbean Sea. The Southwest Pacific has a high concentration of SIDS, as does the Caribbean region. Despite their geographical distribution, they share similar economic, cultural and sustainable development challenges. Adverse impacts of climate change are a major barrier to the achievement of sustainable development goals in SIDS. They will further exacerbate the impact of existing development challenges such as loss of market for traditional exports, declining domestic food production, difficulties associated with attracting foreign direct investments.

Particular socio-economic situations combined with common climate characteristics made SIDS the most vulnerable countries to both climate change and global developments. SIDS experienced the more severe effects of climate change sooner than most other countries among which the rise of sea level and a warming of the ocean surface. Projections show that this warming will be accompanied by an increase in heavy rainfall events and in more intense or frequent cyclones and hurricanes. Some projections foresee economic losses from reduced agricultural yields, loss of mangrove forests, of coral reefs, of terrestrial forests, reduction of freshwater and general water resource. More seriously, some might become non habitable or disappear.

It is no exaggeration to say that our world cultural and natural heritage is directly at risk with climate change.

Education is one of the most effective means to increase adaptation capacity of nations to climate change. It helps individuals to make informed decisions on how to adapt their lives and livelihoods to the effects of global warming. Quality education itself improves the adaptation capacities of affected communities and should be further enhanced by education programmes that explicitly prepare for disaster, promote indigenous knowledge and promote sustainable lifestyles and development. In this regard UNESCO is proposed to organize a three-day international Conference in September 2011 focused on the challenges that climate change poses to education systems in SIDS, with a particular focus on the situation of the Caribbean and the role that education can play in adaptation to climate change.

The objectives of the Conference are to identify the challenges that climate change poses to education systems in SIDS and explore the role that education can play in adaptation to climate change.

The output would include:

- Recommendations on adapting the education systems of SIDS to the impact of climate change on schooling;
- Recommendations on how to integrate Climate change into formal and non-formal education programmes including teacher training and curricula in SIDS.

In 1831, when Charles Darwin embarked on his journey into understanding natural selection, he sailed towards South America, Tahiti and Australia. Indeed, he was seeking new landscapes to help him see with new eyes.

We can't expect to discover new landscapes, but we still have the capacity to look at them differently.

Let's turn our gaze from the highly developed and rich countries to find solutions to those countries and people that can help us to rethink our future and behaviors.

I am convinced, and not because I am a native of the Caribbean region, that our resilient capacity and creative impulse to address climate change lie in these parts of the world that are the most vulnerable to it.

Let's turn the threats into forces and adaptation proofs.

The strengthening of institutions, policy and regulations, in parallel with projects for mainstreaming of adaptation have been acknowledged by governments and UN agencies alike as a key element in the response to climate change. In most SIDS, we still need baseline information for understanding the complex interplay between and within natural and human systems. Traditional knowledge and the communication of science are crucial in this process of creating new knowledge useful to policy-makers and their constituencies. Without this type of information, adaptation policies and decisions on adaptation will remain tentative.

### **Museums of Natural History and Climate Change**

I have recently read that good curators are inspired and imaginative researchers who add their own insights to investigation data, and gradually come up with new ideas and perspectives. We need the imaginative capacity of museums professionals to address climate change.

To address climate change we need new knowledge: on the one hand, to understand its multiple dimensions and, on the other hand, to elaborate effective action around climate change. Museums in parallel to their mission for conservation are institutions that produce knowledge. They deal with nature and culture and their complex interaction. Museums are also science centers. They are places where innovative programming ideas can emerge

to engage societies in discussion on their future, hence visions for the future. Few institutions combine research mission with governance. So do museums. As all gifted persons, museum bears the duty of its virtues.

Natural history museums were the first institutions that studied conservation of Nature and the Environment.

Their role in raising awareness to conservation of Nature and international policy action is worth recalling here. Natural history museums conducted inventories on endangered species and participated in the writing of major international instruments such as the International Convention on Trade of Endangered Species and the International Convention on Biological Diversity. The first Chair for Ecology and the protection of Nature was created in 1955 at the Paris Natural History Museum by its Director, then President of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. I also wish to recall that it is thanks to the Charles Darwin Foundation for the Galapagos action, that the Galapagos Islands have been the first natural site registered on the World Natural and Cultural Heritage List of UNESCO in 1978. In 1954, a young Austrian researcher alerted museums such as the British Museum on the endangered state of the flora and fauna of Darwin islands. Their subsequent action led to the conservation of this natural wonder of the world.

Another example is the use of Biosphere reserves that Natural history museums have contributed to create. Biosphere reserves are areas for demonstrating adaptation measures for natural and human systems, and for assisting the resilience strategies and practices. In numerous biosphere reserves, carbon sequestration constitutes a valuable ecosystem service, for example in forest and wetlands systems. Mobilizing Biosphere reserves for field learning on climate change, impacts, and solutions is therefore an opportunity as well as a solution.

The recent Puerto Morelos declaration issued by the 14th Iberonetwork of the UNESCO Biosphere Programme (9-14 November, 2010) most rightly called for the Biosphere reserves to be incorporated into the financial systems for studies on climate change.

The role of museums in climate change, and more particularly of natural history museums, must be acknowledged. They should fully act as scientific resource centres and as a place to shape policy responses at the regional and international levels.

This is what I consider the challenge for museum professional community in the years to come, because as the poet said once: "what museums say become common good " ("Ce que disent les musées devient le bien de tous")

Finally, what kind of conclusions may we draw from the comments?

The old Tibetan saying resounds again. We couldn't but blame anyone or any natural phenomena and hold them responsible for what will be the future of our planet.

The future is now.

First of all, we need to recognize that Museums are seen, and must be seen in a different light. They are no longer mere buildings that house artifacts, paintings and sculptures. They are living, breathing organisms that affect every aspect of our lives. Museums play a significant role in regulating the economy, monitoring climate change, involving youth and civil society in decision-making programmes.

There has to be measures that would enable museums to respond to new challenges and issues. We should now focus on bringing all these separate issues together to see how their added value can help to provide solutions.

It goes without saying that the integration of social issues, artistic expressions, preservation of culture are important social components for making museums a force to be reckoned with in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond.

Thank you.