

June 25, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

ICOM-US shares the concerns of many of our colleagues about the recent series of resignations that have raised questions about the institutional structure, culture and processes of ICOM. It is clear that this current crisis was precipitated, in part, by the debates concerning the evolving definition of museums, an issue that must not be overshadowed by the recent organizational controversies.

In a world reshaped by a sense of loss and uncertainty due to the impact of a virus and further challenged by social upheaval with demands for greater racial equality and a long overdue reckoning with a nation's historical identity, the need for museums has rarely been greater or more urgent. Museums can often be the glue that holds nations together, provide context and understanding during periods of uncertainty, remind us of beauty and creativity during times of tragedy and loss and, maybe, help us all find hope. But that is only possible if museums refuse to be trapped in traditions that limit their impact. It is essential that museums embrace their role as institutions that matter, that understand their social responsibility as sites that help the public grapple with who they once were, provide tools to help the public better understand the world they face today and point our communities and nations towards a future riven with hope and fairness. The resignations of those who strongly advocated this vision should not allow that perspective to become victim to museum definitions more traditional and less than a full embrace of future potential and relevance.

ICOM-US believes that the debate over the definition of museums is not an ancillary issue that should be shunted aside as ICOM grapples with its institutional issues. Rather, providing clarity and leadership over the future directions of museums is at the heart of what we expect from ICOM. And we believe that a more inclusive and socially responsible definition of museums would do much to restore ICOM's standing as an institution that points museums towards a meaningful future.

Sincerely,



Lonnie Bunch
Co-chair ICOM-US



Tom Loughman
Co-chair ICOM-US