

ICOM Australia statement on the importance of history and truth-telling and the role of museums in society, responding to recent decisions by the Trump administration in the USA

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ICOM Australia upholds the International Code of Ethics that sets the standard for museums and cultural bodies throughout the world. ICOM Australia expresses shock and concern at recent decisions and assertions by the United States Government about the practice of history, the role of their premier museum, the Smithsonian Institution, and the placement of the entire staff of the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) on administrative leave, thus effectively defunding instantly huge numbers of these organisations and communities across the country.

ICOM Australia endorses the Australian Historical Association's statement that the US administration "represents a threat to historians' freedom to produce ethical, excellent, evidence-based research".

History is multi-faceted and evolving, as are the ways in which museums research and present their findings. Critically, truth-telling and correcting dominant and often one-dimensional narratives of the past are an indicator of modern museums which seek to educate more widely and respond to their diverse communities. These are core museum standards.

The Smithsonian Institution is rightly celebrated as world-leading in museum practice, outreach and impact. As Secretary, Lonnie Bunch, says in response to President Trump's executive order, "We will continue to showcase world-class exhibits, collections, and objects, rooted in expertise and accuracy... As always, our work will be shaped by the best scholarship, free of partisanship..."

National Historic Parks and museums, large and small across the US, are also significant and respected organisations for their communities, inspiring and educating people of all ages. As the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) states, "museums are vital community anchors" and ICOM Australia supports AAM in their call for the reversal of the hugely damaging decision regarding the effective dismantling of the IMLS.

ICOM Australia strongly supports the museum community in the United States in their efforts to educate the current administration on the important social and economic role and impact of well-resourced and ethical cultural institutions. Museums and the interrogation of history are an essential element in the functioning of any civil society in the modern world.

Background

ICOM is the largest international network of museum and heritage professionals, with more than 57,000 members around the world. ICOM Australia provides the international voice of Australian museum and gallery professionals and upholds international standards, benchmarks, and ethics.

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