

## **UMAC (ICOM) Statement on Protection of Museum Infrastructure**

Museums are the custodians of the world's artistic, cultural, and scientific heritage. They hold the evidence of human civilization, culture, creativity, imagination and knowledge in their collections. Museums are institutions of research, investigation, inquiry, and learning.

A ravaging fire engulfed the Museu Nacional, a museum at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The incalculable loss of the collections of the largest natural history museum in Latin America has brought the fragility of many museums to the world's attention.

At the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, and in other university museums and collections across the world, irreplaceable objects, specimens, and repositories of knowledge have been lost to preventable disasters. The potential for future catastrophes is enormous as museum facilities age and economic stresses afflict nations and academic institutions. Financial pressure often results in the neglect of the infrastructure in museums .

The devastating fire in Brazil in September 2018 calls attention to the potential for the dire consequences of lack of attention to basic fire prevention systems. To delay any primary disaster prevention infrastructure system seems inexcusable if governments and institutions have any care at all for the preservation of the heritage of their country or institution.

As well as preventing the destruction of physical property, decision makers for governments and universities should be aware of the basic needs for preservation of collections and archives. Physical copies stored offsite are cumbersome and space intensive. A digital database of the collections and digital records of archives and research stored on several offsite servers will preserve at least some records of the accumulated knowledge and a record of the destroyed collections.

Governments and institutions can prevent the catastrophic loss of knowledge if they invest a relatively modest sum in basic disaster preparedness systems in museums and other areas where collections are held and invest in digital storage of collections records and other archives.

UMAC, the International Council of Museums committee on University Museums and Collections, reiterates its full solidarity and support to the Museu Nacional and calls upon national and academic leaders to take responsibility for the preservation of the heritage at risk in their museums. The investment is relatively modest compared to the potential for disaster that exists when these needs are neglected. The inattention of leaders to their responsibilities for the protection of museums and collections and the resources they hold leads to the loss of some of humankind's greatest treasures-- artistic, cultural, and scientific. The knowledge of humankind's history is at risk. UMAC calls upon leaders—national and academic— to take on the responsibility that is theirs, that is, to protect these treasures.

UMAC Board, 8 September 2018