



STATEMENT ON HERITAGE AND PEACE

ICOMOS SCIENTIFIC SYMPOSIUM 2025

Navigating conflict, withstanding the forces of nature, and leveraging heritage for Peace.

We, ICOMOS symposium delegates, have gathered here in Lumbini to explore perceptions of heritage and resilience. We are on a pilgrimage in search of a means of attaining peace in the context of our mission to conserve, promote, and present cultural heritage in all its tangible and intangible forms, in a world which is affected by violent conflicts and recurrent natural disasters.

Over 3 days, we have explored the following three themes:

- Navigating and negotiating conflict
- Withstanding the forces of nature
- Leveraging heritage for peace.

We have visited the Sacred Gardens of Lumbini with mindfulness. This has led to deep contemplation on the role that heritage can play in the establishment and maintenance of peace, and the re-establishment of peace after disruptions caused by conflict and natural disasters. We affirm the message that heritage is key to not only strong cultural identities but also to building economic sustainability, especially for local communities.

We have considered the deceptively simple question: what is peace? Is it just the absence of conflict? Or is it a complex combination of environmental conditions and state of mind that allows individuals and communities and their cultural heritage not only to co-exist but to flourish?

At the inaugural session on Peace, we were reminded that peace begins within each of us and the threats to peace are found not only in physical violence but also in long-term structural inequalities, exploitation, and environmental degradation¹. We heard that the key concepts of Buddhist teachings, *metta* (loving kindness), *karuṇā* (compassion), *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *upekkhā* (equanimity) provide a basis for attaining peace².

Meanwhile, outside the walls of our gathering, wars and violent conflicts continue to affect many countries, the people that call them home, and the cultural sites and traditional practices that provide their sense of identity. Depending on how such terms are defined, there are at least 38 countries currently experiencing war and/or terrorist insurgency.³ There are also undeclared wars on Indigenous Peoples and cultural minorities perpetrated through long-term structural

¹ Nyima Sherpa 16/10/2025

² Venerable Vivekananda 16/10/2025

³ (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-currently-at-war>).

inequalities and racism which are often overshadowed or forgotten in the face of more visible violent conflict.

Over our time in Lumbini we have heard from our colleagues about the conflicts even now affecting their homelands, their communities, and their cultural heritage. Beyond preparedness, delegates shared practical strategies and methods to protect cultural heritage during active conflicts including monitoring, remote sensing, and rapid assessment tools. Delegates presented case studies for post-conflict revival of heritage, including truth-telling through interpretation, digital modelling and community restoration projects, which demonstrated the determination of communities to reclaim and revive their cultural heritage.

We also considered the devastation that can be caused by the forces of nature. Many cultures have adapted building techniques, agricultural strategies, and ecological knowledge over centuries to respond to seasonal weather and environmental conditions. Such traditional wisdom is now often insufficient to withstand the increasing unpredictability and severity of such events in the context of our rapidly changing climate.

It is timely to consider what heritage conservation means when climate change impacts result in an entire country disappearing underwater and its people are forcibly displaced and relocated away from their homelands, with no chance of return. This is the future facing countries such as the small island state of Tuvalu, the Maldives, and Bangladesh. It is predicted that more than 216 million people may be forced to migrate in the near future due to climate change⁴.

Despite the threat of an uncertain future, remarkable case studies of resilience and adaptation have emerged as our colleagues work with communities to record, recover, and revive their heritage. We have heard highly technical approaches to understanding heritage buildings and methods of enhancing their structural resilience, and we have learnt that sometimes the best way to build resilience may be as simple as understanding the carrying capacity of a heritage place and managing the human impact.

As heritage professionals and advocates, what role can we play in such unstable times? How can cultural heritage contribute to navigating peaceful and just paths through this rapidly changing world? We have heard many messages throughout this symposium about how risk preparedness and effective response to disasters impacting cultural heritage contributes to building community resilience.

As we celebrate the 60th anniversary of ICOMOS we have been reminded that in China, 60 is the age of rebirth. The symposium delegates urge our ICOMOS family to stand in solidarity with each other, and continue to share knowledge, methodologies, and experience, as we pursue the pilgrimage to rebirth as an organisation equipped to assist our communities to protect their cultural heritage, sustain traditional knowledge, foster peace and respect amongst cultures. In doing so, we will build a resilient future for the generations to come.

⁴ <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/tuvalu-islands-sea-level-rise-climate-change>