

Kuching Declaration: A Shared Commitment to Safeguarding Living Heritage: *Respect, Enhance, Accept, Partnership*

Adopted at Kuching, Malaysia, October 22, 2026

The 22nd General Assembly of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) held in Kuching, Malaysia from 19 to 23 October 2026 brought together a diverse community of participants from many nations around the world.

This Declaration reaffirms ICOMOS' commitment to safeguarding living heritage in times of disaster and conflict by respecting diversity, enhancing understanding, embracing progress and fostering partnerships to promote sustainability, peace building and mutual benefit.

Preamble

Acknowledging that cultural heritage is increasingly vulnerable to the impacts of disasters and conflicts worldwide, and that heritage objects, structures and landscapes of local, national or global significance are at growing risk. While such events cannot always be prevented, their impacts can be anticipated and mitigated.

Recognising the key challenges and priorities identified in the ICOMOS Triennial Scientific Plans on *Cultural Heritage and Climate Action* (TSP 2021–2024) and *Disaster and Conflict Resilient Heritage: Preparedness, Response, Recovery* (TSP 2024–2027), and in light of ICOMOS' 2020 declaration of a *Climate and Ecological Emergency*, we aim to enhance the resilience of cultural heritage by strengthening emergency response mechanisms, crisis monitoring, risk management and preparedness strategies, and by developing and applying best-practice protocols.

We, the participants of the ICOMOS Scientific Symposium 2026, gathered in Kuching, Sarawak, under the overarching theme “**Living Heritage: Respect, Enhance, Accept, Partnership**”, recognise that heritage is neither static nor isolated. It is a living continuum of tangible and intangible values, knowledge, practices, landscapes, ecosystems, memories and identities, sustained through relationships between people, places, nature and generations.

In response to the challenges posed by climate change, disasters, conflicts, displacement, rapid urbanisation, tourism, technological advances and social transformation, we reaffirm our commitment to the following:

1. Respect Diversity, Identity and Rights

We reaffirm that respect forms the foundation of heritage conservation. Recognising the diversity of cultures, values, identities, beliefs and traditions, we are committed to safeguarding both tangible and intangible heritage through ethical, inclusive and rights-based approaches. We acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples, local communities and traditional knowledge holders in heritage stewardship.

Respect also requires recognition that heritage can represent a variety of shared and sometimes contested memories and narratives. This plurality should be approached through dialogue, mutual understanding and sensitivity towards the communities for whom the heritage is meaningful.

2. Enhance Knowledge, Innovation and Resilience

We commit to strengthening heritage conservation through research, education, innovation, emerging technologies and interdisciplinary collaboration. We promote the integration of traditional knowledge and practices with scientific methods to improve the preparedness for emergencies, strengthen response and recovery, and enhance the long-term resilience of living heritage in the face of disasters, conflicts and rapid transformation.

3. Accept Change while Safeguarding Continuity

We recognise that living heritage is dynamic and continually adapts to environmental, cultural, economic, and social changes. We embrace plural narratives, shared histories, cultural diversity and inclusive approaches that support recovery, reconciliation, and the adaptation and continuity of living heritage, particularly in contexts of conflict and displacement, while maintaining its authenticity and cultural significance.

4. Recognise Traditional, Indigenous and Local Knowledge

We affirm the importance of traditional, Indigenous and local knowledge, skills, craftsmanship and cultural practices as living sources of resilience and innovation. These forms of knowledge and practice should be transmitted through intergenerational learning and incorporated into conservation, disaster risk reduction and climate action, while respecting community ownership and rights.

5. Build Equitable Partnerships and Collaborations

We advocate for meaningful and equitable partnerships and collaborations between communities, Indigenous peoples, governments, heritage professionals, academia, civil society and the private sector. These partnerships must be based on trust, ethics, shared responsibility, transparent communication, participation and, where applicable, Free, Prior and Informed Consent.

6. Strengthen Education, Communication and Interpretation

Recognising the interdependence of cultural and natural heritage, and the tangible and intangible values they represent, we call for improved education and training, meaningful communication and inclusive interpretation and presentation of heritage. This interpretation should amplify the voices of heritage communities, acknowledge shared and contested histories, promote cultural understanding and contribute to peacebuilding and social cohesion.

7.-Empower Communities as Custodians and First Responders

We recognise Indigenous peoples rights along with communities and local stakeholders as active custodians of heritage and as first responders to heritage emergencies. Their leadership, priorities and locally grounded knowledge must be recognised and promoted in heritage policies and management systems through meaningful participation, capacity building, equitable decision-making, and respect for cultural rights. This is particularly important in contexts affected by disasters and conflicts.

8. Advance Climate Action and Disaster Resilience

We commit to strengthening the resilience of heritage through preparedness, response and recovery. Cultural heritage and heritage communities must play an integral role in climate action, disaster risk management and conflict response. Heritage-based solutions and traditional knowledge contribute significantly to sustainable adaptation and resilience.

9. Foster Knowledge Exchange

We encourage an approach that recognises the interconnections between tangible and intangible, cultural and natural heritage, moving beyond isolated monuments and disciplinary boundaries. Shared heritage, cultural routes and common cultural expressions can foster mutual understanding and demonstrate the connections that unite us all.

10. Inspire Future Generations

We reaffirm the importance of recognising and empowering emerging professionals, educators, researchers and cultural practitioners as essential partners in shaping the future of living heritage. We foster ethical practice, creativity, innovation, intergenerational dialogue and the transmission of knowledge and meaning, enabling future generations to understand, sustain and carry living heritage forward with a deep sense of respect and global responsibility.

A SHARED COMMITMENT

Through these commitments, we position cultural heritage as an essential driver of global peace, climate resilience, sustainability and human wellbeing.

We affirm that living heritage is dynamic; it requires more than preservation - it demands active relationship-building, deep participation, continuous learning and decisive action.

*Our framework bridges principle and practice: **Respect** establishes the ethical foundation; **Enhancement** drives knowledge and innovation; **Acceptance** enables responsible adaptation to change; and **Partnership** translates shared values into collective action.*

We pledge to safeguard living heritage as an enduring source of identity, dignity and mutual understanding for present and future generations.

The Kuching Declaration was drafted by :

- Dr. Teresa Patricio, President ICOMOS
- Kerime Danis, President ICOMOS Advisory Committee
- Ar. Dr. Goh Ai Tee, Convenor ICOMOS Scientific Symposium 2026
- Dr. Shaiful Idzwan Shahidan, Chair "Respect" sub-theme ICOMOS Scientific Symposium 2-26
- Dr. Tan Chin Ling, Chair "Enhance" sub-theme ICOMOS Scientific Symposium 2026
- LAr. Dr. Rohayah Che Amat, Chair "Accept" sub-theme ICOMOS Scientific Symposium 2026
- Dr. Indera Syahrul Mat Radzuan. Chair "Partnership" sub-theme ICOMOS Scientific Symposium

CALL TO ACTION

On behalf of the global communities we serve, ICOMOS addresses this Declaration to the United Nations, UNESCO, international bodies, all levels of government, research institutions, non-governmental organisations, and local heritage custodians. We call upon all stakeholders to commit to, invest in, and act upon the following priorities:

- **Transform Knowledge into Practice:** Develop and implement agile research, responsive public policies, and practical toolkits that address the lived realities and socio-economic contexts of living heritage.
- **Empower Community Leadership:** Formally integrate Indigenous Peoples, local communities, youth, and heritage custodians into institutional decision-making, disaster preparedness, and post-crisis recovery processes.
- **Decentralise Knowledge Sharing:** Mobilise cross-regional and interdisciplinary exchange—systematically integrating traditional and Indigenous knowledge systems alongside scientific research to foster resilience and innovation.
- **Build Crisis Capacity:** Equip heritage practitioners, institutions, and communities with the funding, training and communication infrastructure required to absorb, respond to and recover from climate change impacts, disasters and armed conflicts.
- **Enforce Accountability and Strengthen Partnership:** Establish transparent, collaborative actions governed by clear benchmarks that can be monitored, scaled and shared systematically throughout the global ICOMOS network.

*We invite all participants and partners world-wide to endorse the **Kuching Declaration** and translate its principles into concrete commitments to safeguard living heritage and promote peacebuilding through dialogue, learning, collaboration and collective action.*

Let us ensure that living heritage remains meaningful, resilient, and alive.

Let us build:

Through Respect — Meaningful and inclusive conservation

Through Enhancement — Advanced knowledge, innovation, and lasting resilience

Through Acceptance — Responsible adaptation and continuity in times of crisis

Through Partnership — Collective action translating shared values into practice

....

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) is a non-governmental, not for profit international organisation, committed to furthering the conservation, protection, use and enhancement of the world's cultural heritage. With over 12,000 members, 115 National Committees, 31 International Scientific Committees and several Working Groups, ICOMOS has built a solid philosophical, doctrinal and managerial framework for the sustainable conservation of heritage around the world. As an official Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee for the implementation of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, ICOMOS evaluates nominations and advises on the state of conservation of properties inscribed on the World Heritage List.