

Recommendations Working Group 1

Community Responsibility and Involvement in Emergency Preparedness and Response

Introduction

The first issue arising from the discussions was a definition of “museum” which would accord with the realities of all territories and States around the world. It was recognised that the International Council of Museums’ definition of a museum as a “non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment” [ICOM, 1990] would exclude many institutions which manage cultural heritage existing beyond the walls of a conventional museum; that such a definition was derived from the European experience with roots in somewhat elitist traditions; and that it is incompatible with the essential objective of ICOM, which is to conserve, protect and interpret the world’s cultural heritage.

It was therefore agreed that sacred places, archaeological sites, monuments, buildings and other structures indicative of a people’s culture and heritage, should be included, at least for the purpose of this project.

Another issue concerned the definition of “community”. It was agreed that the “community” served by any museum was comprised of many constituent parts or elements, and that to devise a proper strategy for disaster preparedness and response, these elements had to be addressed singly and collectively. The constituent elements include local and national communities, service organisations, governmental agencies, NGOs, private sector organisations, first responders to disasters, etc. A complete list was drawn up.

The discussion then centred on the consideration and categorization of disasters to which museums, as defined above, are susceptible. This was based on the categorization provided by Professor Patrick J. Boylan in his paper presented at the symposium. It includes natural hazards, civil disasters and armed conflict, to which the category of biological hazards was added. It was further recognised that many disasters could result from negligence on the part of the museum institution and/or staff, and that a major loss of audience and/or a substantial decline in visitors could be the result of management deficiencies.

Discussions

There were wide ranging discussions with members of the group who participated fully. The subjects included:

- a) the risk to cultural heritage posed by civil strife and armed conflict, ethnic tensions and terrorism;
- b) problems resulting from the lack of autonomy of museums in some parts of the world;
- c) the representation of a nation's cultural diversity in the context of a national museum versus the individual presentations of the various ethnic/cultural constituent elements of a nation.

It was accepted by consensus that:

- a) attempts should be made by the museum fraternity to engage civil, ethnic and separatist operatives in dialogue so as to communicate the value of heritage to all constituents and focus on the need to share the role of protector;
- b) cross-border collaborations between museums and allied institutions could lead to greater recognition by governmental authorities of the management roles of museum professionals;
- c) while ideally "national museums" promoted national unity, regional and other museums of particular ethno-cultural groups were not necessarily inimical to national solidarity and could give people a sense of belonging to the shared heritage of their country.

Recommendations

The recommended strategies for plans of actions to involve the community (as defined) are summarised below:

- museums must first educate and train their own staff members in disaster preparedness and response through workshops, mock exercises, and ongoing monitoring. This would necessarily involve gathering information on the various Conventions in existence as well as current knowledge on the subject;
- through interpretation and the design of exhibitions, museums should attempt to educate visitors on both the importance of and methods for protecting cultural heritage;
- museums must construct a "map" of the community so as to identify and locate the various constituents in order to establish their different roles in disaster preparedness and response;
- traditional methods of disaster preparedness and response should be investigated so as to integrate them where applicable in established systems;
- museums should identify the disasters to which they are particularly susceptible and ensure that they possess the tools and equipments to mitigate and respond effectively;
- governmental bodies and politicians and other influential persons and institutions should be invited to serve on museum boards and visit the museums so as to gain their support for facilitating the protection of cultural heritage;
- a dialogue should be entered into between fire-fighting units, police and civil defence, public works and utilities, so as to acquaint them with ways in which they could assist and collaborate in the protection of cultural heritage;

- the local branches of the International Red Cross and other international disaster response agencies should be involved in training and disaster mitigation;
- exchanges among museums and other institutions should be promoted so as to establish support networks;
- recommendations should be made to ICCROM, ICOM, ICOMOS and other international agencies to the effect that:
 - (a) workshops and training sessions be organised at regional levels to train museum personnel so that they, in turn, can extend such training to a wider group;
 - (b) a database of case studies be established, evaluated and made accessible to the museums and related institutions around the world.