

18 April 2008 - The International Day for Monuments and Sites

Religious heritage and sacred places

The International Day for Monuments and Sites was created on 18th April, 1982, by ICOMOS and later approved at the 22nd UNESCO General Conference in 1983. This special day offers an opportunity to raise public awareness concerning the diversity of the world's heritage and the efforts that are required to protect and conserve it, as well as to draw attention to its vulnerability.

For several years now, ICOMOS suggests a topic to be highlighted on this occasion, among the multiple dimensions which make up the vast subject that is the cultural heritage we care for. This has allowed our members and our committees to hold activities, conferences, colloquia or other events to raise awareness on this cultural heritage among the public, the owners or the public authorities by linking a global theme to local or national realities.

This year, to mark the 18th April, ICOMOS encourages its National Committees, its International Scientific Committees and members to organise activities with regards to the theme **Religious heritage and sacred places**

A universally present dimension, religious practices and beliefs have led human societies to mark their spaces, build places, carry out works or build up archives loaded with meaning and memories making it one of the most important components of the heritage in today's world. This theme expresses itself in landscapes through place names, or rites and pilgrimages linked to certain natural elements. In addition, in creating this heritage, many past and current societies brought together the sum of all their arts and sciences in the construction of large or modest buildings and the objects they include.

Nowadays, the conservation of this heritage in its heritage dimension can constitute a major challenge for a community. This raises the need to share experiences; for example, that of the Quebec Religious Heritage Foundation in Canada, an innovative model of interdenominational dialogue, which carried out a vast programme (more than 200 million US dollars in 10 years) to restore places of worship and works of art and to adapt such buildings for shared uses, based on ICOMOS principles. At a time when religion is increasingly being recognized by the international community as being one of the major issues for decades to come, the 18 April 2008 will be the occasion for ICOMOS members and committees to take stock of the various dimensions of knowledge, conservation and presentation of this vast heritage. It also offers an opportunity to establish links with the authorities who own or administer places of worship and to enlist their support for ICOMOS and its principles.

In preparation for 18 April 2008, we thus invite you to devise activities and joint events to identify examples of practices or achievements worthy of sharing with your colleagues world-wide to reinforce conservation action, our foremost mission. Such collaboration could be for instance with the religious authorities responsible for these heritage places or with a public or municipal administration, a university, a school or with other associations to build bridges and initiate dialogues which will help us to communicate ICOMOS' concerns to the users of, those responsible for or researchers working on religious heritage and sacred places.

We thank you in advance for all your initiatives and ask you to inform the ICOMOS Secretariat, as early as possible, of the activities you plan to undertake for 18 April, but also to share their results with us (programme, participation, declarations, and publications). This will help us to disseminate information and to gather conclusions on all your activities, so as to be able to testify of the vitality of ICOMOS' network.

In the coming weeks and months, the ICOMOS International Secretariat will be further developing these special web pages to provide you with more ample information on this year's theme. Please consult them regularly!

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