

Message concerning the earthquake and ensuing tsunami in the Indian Ocean

ICOMOS joins the international community in deploring the tragic loss of life due to the tsunami which hit the coasts of several countries across Asia and Africa on Sunday 26 December 2004 and expresses its heartfelt sympathy to the populations and governments struck by this tragedy.

In these days all of our members are asking how we with our professional network can help those countries affected by the Tsunami disaster, and I am very grateful for the many constructive suggestions and ideas we have received. After the disaster of 26 December we tried at once to take up contact with the National Committees of the countries concerned and were extremely relieved to hear that, as far as we could find out, our colleagues had survived this gigantic human catastrophe and had already started making active contributions to saving their endangered cultural heritage. We received the most comprehensive news from ICOMOS Sri Lanka, the country where my predecessor as President of ICOMOS International, Roland Silva, organised the General Assembly of ICOMOS in 1993 - for many of us an unforgettable experience. ICOMOS Sri Lanka intends to present a first damage report by the end of this month.

In the present situation the alleviation of human suffering must of course be first priority. We are touched by a human tragedy of inconceivable dimensions, but we also feel our professional

responsibility to assist the countries hit by the floods to save the damaged and endangered cultural heritage. After all, we believe that this cultural heritage in the form of monuments and sites has a vital role to play in reconstructing lost places and communities and that also after a disaster the preservation of local building traditions is of great importance for the identity of cultural regions. Some of our committees in the affected countries have therefore already started surveying and identifying heritage at risk, – this is urgent work which will continue.

The consequences of the tsunami disaster will also have to be on the agenda of the ICOMOS Executive Committee meeting in early February. At the same time there will also be a meeting of the International Committee of the Blue Shield, a committee bringing together ICOMOS with ICOM (the International Council of Museums), ICA (International Council on Archives) and IFLA (the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions). For future actions in the regions harmed by the flood catastrophe a close co-operation with our partner organisations, in particular ICOM, makes sense, but of course as always in such cases we wish to work under the guidance of UNESCO, and we are also in contact with ICCROM (the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property in Rome), as well as with IUCN, the World Conservation Union, the latter two

Dickwella on the southern coast of Sri Lanka, the building has collapsed, but the statues are intact



being our partners as advisory bodies of UNESCO within the framework of the World Heritage Convention.

Our new *Heritage at Risk Report 2004/2005*, which will come out in the coming weeks, will show once again that many monuments and historic sites are threatened world-wide even if they are on the World Heritage List and that the losses caused not only by natural disasters but also by man are immense. Faced with the gigantic Tsunami catastrophe, which hit mankind exactly one year after the terrible Bam earthquake (26 December 2003), we have to concentrate for the time being on compiling information in order to then be able to start actions under the guidance of the relevant National Committees. No doubt, some of our International Scientific Committees, eg the Committee for Earthen Architecture, will

also be able to make contributions. So I sincerely hope that with the help of all of you the professional network of ICOMOS will prove to be successful even in view of this tremendous challenge.

The International Monuments Day on 18 April 2005, initiated by ICOMOS, will offer many of our committees an extra opportunity to point out the consequences of the tsunami disaster for the cultural heritage.

Paris, 7 January 2005

Michael Petzet
President of ICOMOS