

**Ethics Committee Report to ICOM Advisory Committee & ICOM Executive Council  
(August 2007 meetings, Vienna)**

**Translations of the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (2004; published: ICOM, 2006)**

In addition to the three official language versions of ICOM's Code (in English, French and Spanish), the Ethics Committee is very pleased by the growing number of translations that have been accomplished in other languages. There are now translations published (and available on the ICOM web site) in the following languages: Catalan, Portuguese, Swedish, Magyarul (Hungarian), Finnish, Norwegian, Danish, Polish, Japanese, Korean and Arabic. Fourteen languages in all is excellent progress in the dissemination of the ICOM Code, as the 'base code' for the museum profession internationally. ICOM continues to welcome the presence of diverse national codes evolved through the various national museum associations.

**Cases considered by the Ethics Committee**

Some twelve cases involving substantial ethical issues or potential breaches of the ICOM Code of Ethics have been referred to the Committee during the three-year period, 2004-2007 (many of which are still requiring further attention or action before resolution).

**A new topic for the Ethics Committee – Intellectual Property (IP) issues and museum ethics**

The ethical dimensions of intellectual property (IP) issues in cultural heritage protection have become an important topic for ICOM's attention. This topic was raised formally with the Ethics Committee by ICME, through its Chairperson, Daniel Papuga, in 2006. It was proposed that the Ethics Committee should provide a reflection on this topic as part of its attention to evolving contemporary issues that are leading ethical discussion within the museum profession into new areas.

It has become clear that culturally divergent senses of intellectual property values may give rise to quite diverse applications of ICOM's general principles on ethics for museums among different peoples and communities.

There are particularly urgent issues at present concerning the recognition of intellectual and cultural authority over traditional knowledge (TK) within indigenous communities. Moreover this subject has a close connection to current work of WIPO (Geneva) – especially concerning the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples and forms of recognition that should be considered for their protection legally. Attention by ICOM to WIPO's work in this area is important, and various ICOM Committees are actively seeking to shape a coordinated ICOM contribution to work on the cultural dimensions of copyright and IP regulative frameworks internationally.

**ICOM Ethics Committee's engagement with public debate, discussions and many requests for informal advice about ethical matters**

The work of the Ethics Committee is expanding steadily beyond formal 'cases'. While continuing to serve ICOM, the Committee's attention is drawn continually into an engagement with contemporary cultural heritage debates generally, and many public issues involving the conduct of museums world-wide. Public media have become intensely interested in matters such as repatriation, restitution and the ethics of museum acquisitions in recent years, and journalists and other commentators seek ICOM's opinion or comment on ethical issues quite regularly. This is a sign that ICOM's role in public awareness and consciousness raising about the conduct and ethical responsibilities of the profession is steadily gaining greater prominence and value.

Bernice L Murphy (Chairperson, ICOM Ethics Committee) August 2007