

# Report on International Museum Day 2007

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ICOM selected the theme “**Museums and Universal Heritage**” on the occasion of **International Museum Day 2007**, celebrated during the week of 18 May in more than 70 countries. This International Museum Day conveyed the strong message that “We are all responsible for Universal Heritage”. Although the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* stipulates that “museums are responsible for the preservation and promotion of heritage”, Alissandra Cummins, President of ICOM, nevertheless felt it necessary to stress the fact that “(...) more than ever, we need to raise public awareness on the role of museums in teaching individual and community responsibility with regard to world heritage”.

> Universal Heritage covers not only natural and cultural heritage, as well as the tangible objects that form collections, but also the reasoning, knowledge and intangible forms of expression accompanying them. The thousands of museums that took part in IMD have understood this clearly, which explains why so many different expressions of Universal Heritage were included in the programme of events offered by participating museums and supported by ICOM's National Committees, Ministries of Culture, regions and towns. Several countries focused their activities on anthropology and/or archaeology. **Angola**, for instance, organised a debate on “The Contribution of the National Museum of Anthropology on Asserting Cultural Identity”, coordinated by the anthropologist Américo Kwononoka. Other countries centred their activities on the need for professional training, such as **Algeria**, where two days were devoted to the theme of “Heritage and Museology in Algeria”, the objective being to submit a project to set up a centre for training museum professionals.

> Universal Heritage was also illustrated through pedagogical activities specially organised for children, an example being the Colombo National Museum in **Sri Lanka** which, in addition to presenting collections and exhibitions to highlight national treasures and the rich cultural diversity of the country, organised visits and workshops for certain schools aimed at teaching pupils to identify with their heritage. In **China**, the Forbidden City decided to offer free visits to the children of workers to help them understand the contribution made by their parents to the development of Beijing.

> Other museums preferred to concentrate on their intangible heritage. **Canada**, for example, decided to organise a conference at the Acadian Museum of the University of Moncton, led by M.

Labelle, holder of the McCain Chair of Research on Acadian Ethnology, who discussed the issues involved in preserving Acadian oral heritage in a

**“While museums are traditionally known for their collections, a growing number are playing a determining role in dealing with social questions that concern our communities in order to contribute to their development. The educational and ethical function of museums is to involve contemporary communities belonging to different cultures through exhibitions and workshops, and the way they are conceived. International Museum Day shows that it is possible to co-operate in a new way to interpret the past in the light of the present so as to prepare for a better future”.**

**Alissandra Cummins,  
President of ICOM  
Announcing IMD 2008**

museum as a centre of conservation and dissemination, and used this occasion to emphasize the possibility of a loss of intangible heritage in a country that has not yet ratified the 2003 UNESCO Convention on Intangible heritage. There was also the “Feast of the Loyalists” celebrated at the Museum of New Brunswick. Visitors were able to listen to the story of Charlotte Haines, see the film *The World Turned Upside Down* and discover how the Loyalists lived when they arrived in Canada.

> It is, in fact, interesting to observe that the theme of universal heritage provided an ideal opportunity to return to the origins of art, as in the **Republic of Botswana**, which this year celebrated at the site museum of Tsodilo, included by UNESCO on the World Heritage List. This event was enlivened by performances of plays, music and traditional dances, art exhibitions and guided tours of the museum and rock art sites. Historic visits were also given a place of honour, as in the case of **Israel** where the Union of Arab Women of Bethlehem and the Executive Council of the Museum organised the partial opening of the Historic Museum of Bethlehem, with an exhibition of 50 engravings (16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century).

> These activities, a vital contribution to fostering a sense of responsibility among museums in the world with regard to tangible and intangible heritage, were complemented by activities with a stronger focus on living heritage. In **Portugal**, hip-hop performances, concerts of classical music, films and lectures gave a lively rhythm to International Museum Day. Elsewhere, a number of unforgettable events took place, such as the vertical dances on the façade of the ATRIUM, the Museum Centre for Contemporary Basque Art, in the town Vitoria-Gasteiz, in **Spain**, or the acrobats performing day and night at the Quai Branly Museum in Paris, **France**.

> Priority was given to entertaining and unusual activities at Glen Cove in the **United States**, where a treasure hunt was organised at the geological research centre, the Garvies Point Museum & Preserve.

> Moreover, this special day has, in many cases, been extended to last for a week and even a month, and has now become a festival or *feria* in honour of museums. In **Peru**, for instance, the inhabitants of Lima were invited to the Fifth Feria “of Museums within your reach”, with the participation of 30 museums from Europe and Central Asia.

> But in all cases, it was an open-door day, with free entry and a large number of lectures and exhibitions organised specifically for this occasion. An exhibition entitled “*Jame Jahan Nama*” took place in **Iran** to celebrate International Museum Day, with a display of precious artworks from all over the world at the Cultural Institute of Museums of the Treasury of Bonyad. Ambassadors representing the countries of origin of the exhibited artworks were invited to attend, with a view to encouraging co-operation among museums, in line with the concept created by ICOM of “Universal Heritage Museum Partnerships.”

> The main objective fixed by ICOM for this year was to “demonstrate the extent to which cultural diversity and universal heritage are inseparable”, a challenge that was successfully met. ICOM's invitation to museums and their communities all over the world, to illustrate “how, as a member of a family, a neighbourhood, a nation, an ethnic group or a religion, as citizens, at all levels, we are responsible both individually and collectively to share and protect our respective common heritage”, was largely followed. This initiative will continue quite naturally thanks to 2008 IMD theme, “**Museums: agents of social change and development**”.

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**[http://icom.museum/2008\\_contents.html](http://icom.museum/2008_contents.html)**