



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **ICOM and WIPO to join forces in Cultural Heritage and Museum Fields**

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The International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) are set to collaborate on the management of intellectual property issues, and on a mediation programme for the settlement of disputes in the area of cultural heritage and museums. This collaboration will address, in particular, copyright issues, traditional cultural knowledge and expression, and the digitization of cultural heritage. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed by the heads of both organisations at WIPO in Geneva on 3 May, 2011.

Museums can be involved in various types of disputes including returns and restitutions, intellectual property rights, custodianship and the ownership of objects in their collections. ICOM, together with the WIPO Arbitration and Mediation Center, is launching a dedicated mediation process for the resolution of these types of disputes. Specific ICOM-WIPO Mediation Rules have been developed and parties may choose from a joint list comprising mediators with experience in cultural heritage and related areas. The mediation mechanism is expected to be operational in June.

ICOM is highly involved in promoting the restitution of illicitly acquired cultural property. The organisation is committed to supporting museums in achieving this goal, in accordance with the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*, and also its international public service mission to fight illicit traffic in cultural property. The concept of a Mediation Project for art and cultural heritage was etched in 2006 by ICOM.

Dr Hans-Martin Hinz, ICOM President, and Mr Julien Anfruns, ICOM Director General, signed the Memorandum of Understanding on behalf of ICOM. Julien Anfruns declared: *“In 2010, ICOM had the honour to facilitate the donation of the Makonde mask to the United Republic of Tanzania. Today, together with WIPO, ICOM -an organization which is fully committed to the conservation, continuation and communication to society of the world's natural and cultural heritage-, continues to develop this commitment, contributing to a constructive dialogue between those involved in disputes relating to cultural heritage”.*

In signing the Memorandum of Understanding, WIPO Director General Francis Gurry commented: *“Collaboration between WIPO and ICOM reflects the many linkages between cultural heritage, including traditional knowledge, traditional cultural expressions as well as other indigenous cultural materials, and intellectual property in general. It highlights the important role of intellectual property management in relation to museums’ collections of the world’s many and diverse cultural riches. The sensitivities that can be associated with disputes in those sectors make it important to improve access to dispute resolution options”.*

## **ICOM in short**

Created in 1946, ICOM (International Council of Museums) is an international non-governmental organisation maintaining formal relations with UNESCO. Within the United Nations, ICOM has a consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. ICOM is the only international organisation representing museums and museum professionals on a global level.

ICOM is:

- A diplomatic forum made up of representatives from 137 countries and territories
- Standards of excellence for museums including ethics (*ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*)
- A unique international network of more than 30,000 museum professionals around the world
- A think-tank composed of 31 International Committees which represent museum specialties
- Missions of international public service notably in the fight against illicit traffic of cultural property and emergency programmes in case of natural disasters or armed conflicts.

**For all questions concerning the world museum community and for interview requests with ICOM's Director General, please contact the press office:**

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