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## **The reduction in public funding threatens the very existence of museums**

As our Brazilian colleagues assess the extent of the devastating loss to the world's cultural heritage following the fire at their National Museum, we, the international museum community, are forced to face some hard facts about our sector.

The ongoing trend of reduction in public expenditure on cultural heritage threatens the very existence of museums in many parts of the world. The generic term 'cultural heritage' is frequently used by national governments to identify spending on a nation's historic properties, monuments, sites and museums with each of these aspects in receipt of only a portion of the total budget.

Public funding for new museum capital projects presents an inflated picture as funds for on-going operations are steadily declining. In the face of such adversity, museums have shown great resilience and creativity in attracting and generating new sources of revenue, from sponsors and donors or merchandising activities. However, these models can only be sustainable with strong government backing in the form of public policies and a clear commitment to fund museums' daily operations.

The importance of public investment in cultural heritage and museums cannot be overestimated. Our institutions are vital public resources that preserve our collective memory and our legacy for future generations – as did the National Museum in Rio de Janeiro. They are incomparable places of learning and discovery for all strata of society, even the most marginalised.

Governments must set out policies to support this crucial mission, prioritising museum security, as well as the continuous protection, maintenance and research of collections. Without this support, vital aspects of a museum's operations are neglected, which can lead to disastrous results as the Brazilian experience illustrates all too painfully.

The National Museum of Brazil cannot be quickly and simply rebuilt, but the support and solidarity provided by our international community of museums and the general public reaction are a testament to the strength of our field and museums' ability to touch lives.

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) calls on policy- and decision-makers worldwide, in the wake of the National Museum of Brazil disaster, to recognise the need to care for museums, to allocate adequate funding and to develop policies that will allow these cultural institutions to carry out their vital role in society for generations to come.

We stand ready to collaborate with national and regional governments, in particular the Brazilian government, with our partner institutions, ICCROM, UNESCO and OECD, and other international organisations to reflect on the future of museums, and to ensure that a disaster of this magnitude is never repeated.