

**ICOM STANDING COMMITTEE (ETHCOM)**  
**Revision of ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums**  
**August - October 2025**

---

**THIRD DRAFT OF THE REVISED CODE OF ETHICS FOR  
MUSEUMS**

---

## **MAIN ELEMENTS OF THE REVISED CODE OF ETHICS**

- I. INTRODUCTION**
- II. PREAMBLE**
- III. MUSEUM DEFINITION**
- III. PRINCIPLES**
- IV. GLOSSARY**
- V. ANNEX<sup>1</sup>**

---

<sup>1</sup> Annex with references to the most relevant international legal framework will be added in the final text of the revised Code of Ethics.

## INTRODUCTION

ICOM recognises that this Code was written during demanding times. Museums face geopolitical, social, economic and climatic challenges, while some long-accepted societal practices and attitudes are being questioned. Museums, as vital civic institutions, are profoundly affected by these changes and should lead the way in addressing them. Yet

- we have only begun to understand the impact of rapidly evolving digital technologies on our understanding of history, culture, creativity and art;
- we confront the global challenge of the climate crisis, striving to achieve carbon neutrality, while communicating to the public our evolving understanding of the interdependence of humans and ecosystems; and
- we must address the role that museums have played during the colonising process but have yet to comprehend its implications for all museums and their collections, related policies, practices and programmes, as well as for museum discourse.

These examples illustrate the challenges museums face, provide the backdrop for this revision of ICOM's Code, and demand both firm resolve and flexibility in the face of change. ICOM recognises that the global museum community is diverse, with a variety of governance models, capacities, capabilities and resources. To address issues related to museums worldwide, the Code was developed as a set of core principles to guide action in museums. ICOM acknowledges that the principles may be aspirational for some museums that lack the resources to comply with them fully, but they articulate standards that museum professionals believe in and share. The principles will be complemented by sets of guidelines that will provide more specific help on topics integral to the museum profession.

This Code of Ethics is the result of a unique participatory process. From 2019 to 2025, it was developed through five consultations with ICOM's National Committees, International Committees, Regional Alliances and Affiliated Organisations, as well as related Standing Committees, Working Groups and external experts. During this process, the membership shared their professional perspectives, expressing essential values and standards fundamental to their work. This Code articulates those standards as clearly as possible and aims to serve as a beacon for museums.

The Standing Committee on Ethics (ETHCOM)

## **PREAMBLE**

### ***ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums***

The *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* is a cornerstone for the International Council of Museums. Together with ICOM's Statutes and Internal Rules, the Code of Ethics forms one of the three pillars upon which ICOM stands. As stated in its Statutes, ICOM establishes ethical principles based on values widely recognised by the international museum community. Practices grounded in integrity, responsibility, equity, mutual respect, openness, transparency and accountability are essential to ensure that museums protect and promote heritage, sustain and increase trust, and serve the public. These values entail obligations to society and the museum profession, as well as a duty to provide opportunities for knowledge-sharing, dialogue and reflection. They also involve responsibilities to safeguard and research collections in museums' care and to govern conscientiously and sustainably.

### **To Whom Does This Code Apply?**

According to ICOM's statutes, all ICOM members agree to abide by this Code as a condition of their membership. The Code sets forth core principles to guide museums and museum professionals in their internal and external activities. In addition to its members, the activities of ICOM's National and International Committees, Regional Alliances and Affiliated Organisations are bound by the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*. Furthermore, although not binding for non-members, the Code serves as a point of reference for people who work in and with museums worldwide.

ICOM encourages its members, both museums and museum professionals, to ensure that the principles of the Code of Ethics are upheld by everyone who works in and with their institutions.

### **Law and Ethics**

Local, national and international laws and conventions establish the baseline for action by museums and museum professionals. Operating within such legal frameworks is obligatory for all museums and museum professionals.<sup>2</sup> This Code of Ethics goes beyond compliance with the law and establishes a higher standard for

---

<sup>2</sup> A list of related international conventions and declarations is included in the Appendix to this Code.

action. Together with the law, the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* serves to maintain the integrity of museums and public trust.

## Core Principles

Each of the five core principles of the *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* is equally important to museums. They provide a point of departure for resolving ethical dilemmas through careful decision-making, involving thoughtful deliberation and discussion. The Code and its Principles are not a substitute for institutional policies and procedures.

This Code is monitored by ICOM's Standing Committee on Ethics (ETHCOM) and enforced by the ICOM Executive Board. ICOM's Statutes and Internal Rules outline the consequences of violating the Code of Ethics for individual members, National and International Committees, Regional Alliances and Affiliated Organisations. For questions or clarifications around specific principles or their application to a particular case, ICOM's Standing Committee on Ethics (ETHCOM) can be consulted.

## Museum Definition

‘A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge-sharing.’

For Back Cover:

The *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums* has a history of nearly 40 years, starting with the *ICOM Code of Professional Ethics*, which was adopted by the 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of ICOM in Buenos Aires (Argentina) on 4 November 1986. The Code was amended by the 20<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Barcelona (Spain) on 6 July 2001, retitled *ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums*, and revised by the 21<sup>st</sup> General Assembly in Seoul (Republic of Korea) on 8 October 2004. [This version of the Code was adopted by ICOM \_\_\_\_\_] It follows the adoption of a new museum definition at the 26<sup>th</sup> General Assembly in Prague (Czech Republic) on 24 August 2022. Published in the three official languages of ICOM – English, French, and Spanish – ICOM welcomes translations of the Code into other languages by ICOM's Committees.

(blank page)

## **SOCIETY: Museums Serve Society**

**Principle:** *Museums serve society by protecting and interpreting tangible, intangible and digital heritage. Accessible and inclusive, museums collaborate with diverse individuals and communities to care for their past, present and future. By embracing different perspectives on heritage, museums operate as spaces for open dialogue, upholding human rights, practising social justice and promoting peace.*

### **S.1. Museums should preserve and share tangible, intangible and digital heritage for the benefit of society.**

By documenting, researching, preserving, interpreting and sharing heritage, museums play a vital role in maintaining the continuity of society. They have a duty to respect all traditions and cultures equally, to encourage the sharing of knowledge across generations and to ensure that the collections they care for remain available for future generations.

### **S.2. Museums should support the right and the agency of members of society to participate in and contribute to cultural life.**

Museum work should be informed by members of society. It should respect their agency and diversity of knowledge and honour their right to participate in museum activities. It should value their physical, mental and emotional well-being and the desire for social justice. When opposing opinions or conflicts emerge due to cultural differences, museums should be safe spaces for dialogue and promote mutual understanding.

### **S.3. Museums should foster dialogue and knowledge-sharing through enduring cooperation and collaboration.**

Museums should work with members of society, including scholars and other experts, students, other museums and heritage organizations to enrich museum practices in researching, collecting, conserving, documenting and interpreting heritage.

Museums should involve community members in decisions about their heritage and creative expressions, collaborating with them and respecting their right to identify, preserve and interpret their tangible, intangible and digital heritage. Respecting those



they learn from, museums should seek their free, prior and informed consent, acknowledge their contributions and provide equitable compensation.

#### **S.4. Museums should guarantee access for all.**

Museums should make tangible, intangible and digital heritage, along with all related non-confidential information, accessible to everyone. They should also strive to eliminate barriers to participation, including but not limited to physical, virtual, linguistic, socio-cultural and economic obstacles.

#### **S.5. Museums should foster inclusive participation and combat discrimination.**

As inclusive institutions, museums should actively address social exclusion by promoting equitable participation for all and combating prejudice, including discrimination based on but not limited to disability, gender, race, sexual orientation and belief systems. They should address issues of institutional racism and respect Indigenous rights and their self-determination.

#### **S.6. Museums should represent diverse cultures while respecting the sensitivities reflected in heritage.**

Museums should promote plural interpretations of heritage, respecting differences in research, collections management, conservation, interpretation and display. They should acknowledge that some tangible, intangible and digital heritage have a sacred nature and follow proper protocols in handling these sensitive materials. Museums should show reverence and respect for the sciences, traditional knowledge and belief systems of Indigenous Peoples.

#### **S.7. Museums should practise and promote sustainability, proactively and continuously.**

Museums should aim for long-term social, environmental, cultural and financial sustainability. This means prioritising the well-being of everyone involved, minimising environmental impact to fight climate change, and maintaining financial stability. They should operate in ways that respect human rights and reduce inequalities, ensuring their practices benefit people, protect the planet and promote prosperity in a socially responsible manner.

**PROFESSIONALISM: Museums operate and communicate with professional expertise, knowledge and standards.**

**Principle:** *To sustain society's trust, museums should operate and communicate ethically and according to professional standards. This entails responsibilities for the museum's leadership, those accountable for the day-to-day management of the museum and the implementation of its strategic plan, and for everyone working in and with museums.*

**P.1. Museum leaders should recruit staff and volunteers to uphold and enhance the institution's professionalism.**

Museum leaders should engage staff and volunteers who collectively have the skills needed to achieve the institution's mission, vision, goals and objectives. They should offer ongoing education and professional development to ensure the skills required to operate the museum and communicate effectively both internally and externally are maintained.

**P.2. Everyone who works in and with museums should always demonstrate courtesy, respect and integrity.**

Museum leaders should ensure that fair and inclusive practices are maintained in all interactions with staff, visitors and community members, avoiding any form of discrimination. Everyone working in and with museums should follow established standards of behaviour by respecting the dignity of all their colleagues. Collaboration among the governing body, leadership, staff and volunteers should be based on mutual respect and acknowledgement of their different, yet complementary and interdependent roles.

**P.3. Museum leaders should care for the safety and well-being of staff and volunteers.**

Museum leaders should attend to the safety of their staff and volunteers, create conditions that support physical, mental and emotional well-being, and provide equitable pay. This includes planning concrete actions that can be quickly implemented to protect staff during emergencies such as armed conflicts, environmental disasters and health crises.

**P. 4. Everyone who works in and with museums should follow the policies and procedures of the museum.**

Everyone working in and with museums should understand and support the museum's goals and objectives, core values, policies and procedures, conditions of employment and ethical guidelines. Differing opinions should be properly expressed and considered before final decisions are made. If irregularities occur or a museum's practices are seen as damaging to the museum or the broader museum community, members of museum professions should object appropriately.

**P.5. Everyone who works in and with museums should protect confidential information obtained as part of their work.**

Confidential and personal data should be protected to ensure the safety and security of the institution. This includes but is not limited to information about the security of the museum and its collections, personal data about staff, volunteers, and contractors, financial information and confidential data and information about donors.

**P. 6. Members of museum professions should collaborate and consult with colleagues, other experts and community members outside the museum to ensure best practices.**

Members of museum professions should recognise and support the importance of cooperation and consultation among institutions with shared goals and practices. They should build working relationships, locally, regionally and internationally, and collaborate with individuals and community members outside their museum for the benefit of the institution. When the expertise available in a museum is not enough to ensure good decision-making, members of museum professions have a duty to consult with colleagues and others with relevant expertise outside the museum.

**P. 7. Museum leaders should take responsibility for digital technologies used by the museum, evaluating the benefits of these technologies and ensuring they do no harm.**

Museum leaders should ensure that their use of digital media and digital technologies aligns with established standards as well as institutional goals and

missions. Everyone working in and with museums who uses these technologies should help reduce risk by considering the potential ethical implications and environmental impact of the technologies as well as their capacity for spreading inaccurate or false information. They should proceed cautiously, mindful of the impact of these technologies on intellectual property rights, Indigenous rights and data sovereignty.

**P. 8. Everyone who works in and with museums should guard against any conflict of interest with the museum.**

Every museum should create and publish a policy on accepting gifts, favours, loans, hospitality, or other benefits to help staff and volunteers avoid conflicts of interest. Everyone working in and with museums should disclose any real or perceived conflicts of interest, including private collecting related to the museum's collecting interests, and avoid engaging in activities that could compromise their professional duties or the museum's reputation. Members of museum professions should never endorse a specific dealer, auctioneer, or appraiser to the public.

**P. 9. Everyone who works in and with museums should work actively to prevent illicit trafficking in cultural property.**

Everyone who works in and with museums should not participate, directly or indirectly, in the plunder, damage or destruction of tangible, intangible or digital heritage. They should not directly or indirectly participate in buying or selling heritage for profit.

Museums and members of museum professions should combat illicit trafficking by researching the origin and history of each item in their collections and maintaining documentation and inventories of their collections. Museums should collaborate with other museums, heritage institutions, law enforcement agencies and regional, national and international organisations that fight illicit trafficking and ensure compliance with applicable laws and international conventions.

**EDUCATION: Museums offer diverse experiences for knowledge sharing and reflection.**

**Principle:** *Museums' educational activities and practices should ensure ongoing knowledge- sharing and dialogue.*

**E.1. Museums should reach out to diverse audiences, aligning all activities with their mission.**

Museums should clearly define how they will achieve their educational goals, fostering diversity through their programmes, exhibitions and publications, whether on-site or online. These activities should be vehicles for accepting and respecting different cultural traditions, promoting multilingual, intercultural dialogue.

**E.2. Museums should maintain and preserve the integrity of all information they present.**

Museums should ensure the accuracy, credibility and reliability of the information they share through their activities, including cultural events, educational programmes, exhibitions and publications. All information should be well-founded, accurate and grounded in the relevant academic and scientific disciplines, traditional knowledge or belief systems.

**E.3. Museums should establish enduring partnerships with communities to enhance their educational activities.**

Museums should collaborate with individuals and communities whose tangible, intangible and digital heritage they hold in their collections and present in their programmes, publications and exhibitions. Museums should seek out and respect Indigenous Peoples' traditional knowledge, practices, languages, laws, rights and customs regarding the display of items in their collections. All Indigenous tangible and intangible heritage and traditional knowledge should only be used in museum activities with free, prior and informed consent.

**E.4. Museums should be accessible to all and consider their visitors' needs and interests to ensure everyone can benefit equally from the museum's educational activities.**

Museums should develop the content and physical formats of their educational programmes, including exhibitions and publications, both on-site and online, to ensure inclusive and accessible participation for everyone. To enhance social relevance, inclusivity and meaningful engagement, audience feedback should be integrated into programme development.

Museums should ensure public access to all educational programmes, exhibitions and publications in their communications, which should recognise the dignity and humanity of the individuals and communities involved. Publications should adhere to accessible editorial guidelines, standards and policies, without compromising the standards of the institution.

**E.5. Museums should attend to all sensitive materials with care, striving to use them in educational programmes, exhibitions and publications in accordance with professional standards.**

Museums should develop guidelines concerning the display and use of the sensitive materials in their collections in museum activities, exhibitions and programmes. When feasible, the methods of display and use of these materials should be determined in dialogue with the communities whose collections the museums hold.

Requests from these communities to limit access to sensitive materials or remove sacred or culturally significant materials from public display, whether on-site or online, should be addressed promptly, respectfully and transparently. Museums should establish clear policies and procedures for handling such requests, taking into account applicable laws and international conventions.

**E. 6. Museums should foster knowledge-sharing and reflection.**

In all their educational activities, whether formal or informal, museums should foster the exchange of knowledge and encourage reflection. Recognising that museum collections include not only tangible, intangible and digital heritage but also ideas and traditional knowledge, museums should employ various pedagogical methods to promote active learning, critical thinking and lively interactions between the public and the works or objects on display.

**E.7. Museums should use technology responsibly in their educational programmes, exhibitions and publications.**

When using digital media and digital technologies as pedagogical tools, museums should manage them intentionally and in accordance with their mission. They

should make every effort to present an accurate historical, scientific and artistic

record. Museums should maintain an awareness of how digital media and digital technologies affect users and ensure that measures are in place to protect their audiences' physical, mental and emotional well-being.

**E.8. Museums should be committed to maintaining their capacity to protect heritage for future generations, promoting sustainability.**

Museums should play a fundamental role in educating society about the importance of sustainability while promoting the preservation of tangible, intangible and digital heritage as well as our planet.

Museums should encourage those who work in and with museums to continuously improve their teaching methods and incorporate innovative and sustainable practices into educational programmes, exhibitions and publications.

**E.9. Museums should implement reparative practices to encourage critical reflection, supporting communities' right to reclaim their cultural heritage.**

Museums should acknowledge and help repair past injustices and support all cultural rights, including the rights of Indigenous Peoples and other communities whose collections they hold. They should enable all communities to reconnect with their history, fostering knowledge-sharing and dialogue among their audiences. Discussions and dialogue about restitution, repatriation, repatriation and the return of heritage should afford opportunities to learn about different cultures, practices and knowledge



## **COLLECTIONS: Museums research, collect and conserve.**

**Principle:** *Museums collect, safeguard and display tangible, intangible and digital heritage. They should ensure the security, documentation, preservation and conservation of the collections they hold. Museums conduct research and transmit knowledge in trust for society, respecting diverse perspectives and the rights of communities whose collections they hold.*

### **C.1. Museums should create and maintain a collections policy.**

Museums should develop, adhere to and publish a collections policy that specifies the procedures for acquisition, documentation, protection and use of the tangible, intangible and digital heritage in their care. The museum's governing body should approve and regularly review the collections policy.

### **C.2. Museums should be responsible for the collections in their care.**

Museums should ensure the security, documentation, preservation and conservation of the tangible, intangible and digital heritage in their care. They should follow established standards and procedures as set up in the collections policy. Museums should develop specific procedures within their collection policies for sensitive materials, in accordance with traditions, applicable laws and international conventions. Materials of sacred or religious significance and culturally sensitive material should be cared for respectfully in ways appropriate to the cultural traditions of the communities from which they originated and biological specimens and toxic substances should be stored securely.

When making replicas, reproductions or digital copies, museums must respect the integrity of the original. All copies should be clearly and permanently marked as facsimiles to ensure transparency and prevent misrepresentation.

### **C.3. Museums should uphold the inherent dignity of and respect for the significance of human remains.**

Museums should research and care for human remains as well as artefacts and creative expressions that include human remains with respect. Decisions about these items and collections should be made in collaboration with descendants or communities from which they originate, if known. In cases where human remains hold continuing cultural or spiritual importance, museums should consider repatriation or restricted use as appropriate.



**C.4. Museums should adhere to professional acquisition and accessioning practices.**

Museums should follow established standards and procedures for acquiring objects, whether through purchase, gift, loan, bequest or exchange. Museums should ensure that all objects have been obtained in accordance with applicable laws and international conventions regulating ownership, import, export and transfer of cultural or natural materials. Provenance research should be carried out with due diligence to establish an object's origin and history. Fossil material should be acquired only when there is evidence that it was collected using scientific methods or non-destructive practices.

In an emergency, museums can serve as temporary repositories for objects if their preservation is at risk. This temporary protection should be agreed upon with the States, institutions or individuals requesting shelter.

**C.5. Museums should establish documentation procedures and develop databases to ensure the long-term viability and security of their collections.**

Museum collections should be documented following established standards and procedures. Documentation should include comprehensive information about the objects in the museum's care, created in collaboration with interdisciplinary professionals and, where applicable, the communities from which the objects originated. Museum documentation and databases should be stored in a secure environment and supported by recovery infrastructure and techniques to mitigate the risk of data loss. Except for confidential or sensitive information, the complete records should be made accessible to the public, both on-site and online.

**C.6. Museums should collaborate on research to enhance the understanding and interpretation of heritage.**

Museums should carry out research to foster a deeper understanding of the tangible, intangible and digital heritage in their care. They should collaborate with communities regarding objects in museum collections. Fieldwork should adhere to best practices and show respect and consideration for community views, environmental resources and cultural and human rights.

The traditional knowledge and belief systems of communities should be recorded with free, prior and informed consent. They should be held respectfully, following established standards, collaborative processes, intellectual property laws and principles of confidentiality.

### **C.7. Museums should provide access to heritage for research and study.**

Museums should ensure equitable access to the collections in their care, as well as to associated documentation. Museums should also make research results available and publish them to guarantee that this information is disseminated to the public and accessible for future generations.

Access may vary depending on the condition and sensitivity of the material involved. Personal information contained in collection records should be disclosed or withheld in accordance with applicable legislation and international conventions.

### **C.8. Museums should develop procedures for responsible deaccessioning and disposal.**

Museums should develop a responsible deaccessioning policy, defining the standards and requirements for disposing of deaccessioned objects. The disposition of an object from a museum collection should only be undertaken after considering its significance, the possibility of transferring the object to another museum, its character and legal standing, as well as any loss of public trust that might result from such action.

Museum collections are held in trust for the public and should not be treated as realisable assets. Compensation received from the sale of deaccessioned objects should be used solely to benefit the museum's collection.

### **C.9. Museums should actively respond to requests for restitution and return and, when appropriate, pursue voluntary return.**

Museums should promptly and transparently respond to requests for restitution. The return of items from a museum's collection should align with applicable laws and international conventions. Restitution, repatriation, rematriation and return should be considered to States as well as local and Indigenous populations. Museums should be prepared to engage with the requesting party constructively, base all exchanges on scientific and historical facts and documentation, as well as traditional or spiritual knowledge, and remain open to dialogue about restitution and return.

When provenance research reveals new information about an item's ownership history, museums should voluntarily pursue its return. If a decision is made to return heritage, museums should develop a collaborative process with the requesting party to ensure the safe return of the heritage to its rightful source.

**GOVERNANCE: Museums are not-for-profit, permanent institutions.**

**Principle:** *Governing bodies, those concerned with the strategic direction and oversight of museums, are responsible for the long-term sustainability of their institution. They should secure the professional, physical and financial resources necessary to maintain the museum and serve communities.*

**G.1. Museums' governing bodies should make their legal status, not-for-profit certification and core documents publicly available.**

Museums should adopt a mission statement and strategic plan to guide all their activities. They should be transparent about their legal status and governance structure and comply with all laws and international conventions.

**G.2. The governing body should establish policies that serve as tools for the museum's governance.**

The governing body should adopt and publish institutional policies, including those for collections, income generation, fundraising, institutional integrity, board and staff diversity and emergency response. These policies should be conceived in collaboration with all museum workers and regularly updated to maintain professional standards, provide a clear framework for decision-making, and safeguard the museum's future.

**G.3. The governing body should secure the resources necessary for the museum's longevity.**

The governing body and museum leadership should secure the professional, physical and financial resources needed to enable the museum to achieve its mission and strategic goals. Museums should diversify their sources of income and seek to support environmental and social sustainability.

**G.4. The governing body should safeguard the museum's integrity and autonomy, resisting any influence that could compromise their mission or values.**

The governing body should ensure the museum serves as a safe space for dialogue and learning. Regardless of funding sources or governance model, museums should maintain control of the content and integrity of their programmes, exhibitions, activities and publications. Income-generating activities should not compromise the integrity of the institution. Museums should resist financial or political influence.

**G.5. The governing body should ensure that the museum leadership has the knowledge and skills needed to fulfil their responsibilities.**

The governing body should understand the qualifications and expertise necessary for museum leadership roles. It should identify and select candidates for governance and management positions who are qualified to address the museum's challenges in fulfilling its mission and provide the appropriate training when needed.

**G.6. The governing body should reflect the diversity of the communities it serves and strive for inclusive representation and leadership.**

The composition of the governing body should reflect the communities the museum serves. Where appropriate, the governing body should promote co-creation, practices based on shared authority and transparency, and secure the support for communities to be involved in ongoing and sustainable collaborative processes. This commitment should be formalised in institutional policies. Museums should practise inclusive leadership to advance their mission, foster innovation and enhance institutional impact.

**G.7. The governing body should ensure the care and respect of those who work in and with the museum.**

The governing body should promote respectful and fair working relationships among museum staff and collaborators, embracing employment practices that align with principles of equality and human rights. They should ensure dignified and equitable working conditions, prevent precarious employment, and foster a healthy, fair and respectful workplace.

## **Glossary**

### **Community**

A community is a group of individuals connected by shared elements such as a sense of place, locality, culture, belief systems, political systems, common needs, or collective memories. Communities are dynamic, continually shaped and reshaped by the interactions and relationships among their members.

### **Conflict of interest**

The presence of a personal or private interest that gives rise to a clash of principles in a work environment, thus limiting, or seeming to limit, the objectivity of decision making.

### **Conservation**

All measures and actions aimed at safeguarding tangible cultural heritage while ensuring its accessibility to present and future generations. Conservation embraces preventive conservation, remedial conservation and restoration. All measures and actions should respect the significance and the physical properties of the cultural heritage item<sup>3</sup>.

### **Documentation**

A systematic process of acquiring, organizing, storing, retrieving, issuing, recording, and archiving information. It includes printed, electronic, audio-visual and digital materials that convey images and information.

### **Due diligence**

The requirement that every effort is made to establish the facts of a case before deciding a course of action, especially in identifying the source and history of an item offered for acquisition or use before acquiring it.

---

<sup>3</sup> International Council of Museums – Committee for Conservation. (2008). *Terminology to characterize the conservation of tangible cultural heritage: Resolution adopted by the ICOM-CC membership at the 15th Triennial Conference, New Delhi, 22–26 September 2008*. ICOM-CC.

**Governing body**

The persons or organisations designated in the museum's enabling legislation as responsible for the strategic direction and oversight of museum governance.

**Institutional racism**

In its institutional forms, racism can appear in less obvious or more subtle ways, as in regulations or laws that are systemic within societies, in criminal justice, employment, education and also in cultural representations.

**Intellectual property**

Area of law concerned with intellectual creations. Intellectual property law distinguishes between literary and artistic property, which is governed by the law on copyright and related rights (for music performers, as well as record, video and database producers, publishers and news agencies); and industrial property (patents, brand, industrial designs registered designations).

**Museum leaders**

Those responsible for the day-to-day management of the museum and the implementation of its strategic plan.

**Members of museum professions**

Members of museum professions provide services, knowledge and expertise for museums and the museum community. These individuals may be paid staff, unpaid volunteers or consultants who bring specific expertise to museum, and require either specialised training or equivalent practical experience in any field relevant to the management and operations of a museum.

**Provenance**

The complete history and ownership of an item, from the time of its discovery or creation to the present day, that establishes its authenticity and rightful ownership.

**Repatriation/ Rematriation**

Repatriation or rematriation encompasses the whole process of restoration or return to the country of origin. The terms repatriation, rematriation, restitution and return are often used when advocating for the return to its rightful owners of what has been lost or appropriated in unethical or unlawful ways.

The use of the four terms, repatriation, restitution and return differs from country to country and according to the items in question.

### **Restitution/Return**

The term refers to the act of returning or repatriating cultural belongings or natural specimens, objects, works of art or other material to claimants, often referred to as source countries or source communities.

### **Restoration**

All actions directly applied to a single and stable item aimed at facilitating its appreciation, understanding and use. These actions are only carried out when the item has lost part of its significance or function through past alteration or deterioration. They are based on respect for the original material. Most often such actions modify the appearance of the item<sup>4</sup>.

### **Traditional knowledge**

Knowledge, innovations and practices of indigenous and local communities around the world. Developed from experience gained over the centuries and adapted to the local culture and environment, traditional knowledge is transmitted orally from generation to generation. It tends to be collectively owned and takes the form of stories, songs, folklore, proverbs, cultural values, beliefs, rituals, community laws, local language and agricultural practices, including the development of plant species and animal breeds. Traditional knowledge is mainly of a practical nature, particularly in such fields as agriculture, fisheries, health, horticulture, forestry and environmental management in general.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> International Council of Museums – Committee for Conservation. (2008). *Terminology to characterize the conservation of tangible cultural heritage: Resolution adopted by the ICOM-CC membership at the 15th Triennial Conference, New Delhi, 22–26 September 2008*. ICOM-CC

<sup>5</sup> Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD). (2007). *Article 8(j) Introduction: Traditional Knowledge and the Convention on Biological Diversity*.