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REPORT ON THE POSSIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING AN INTERNATIONAL
FUND FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF MUSEUMS, MONUMENTS AND
COLLECTIONS OF UNIVERSAL INTEREST

I HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

1. The Mexican Government's proposal

At its Sixth Session, the General Conference adopted a resolution authorizing the Director-General, in collaboration with the Consultative Committee on Monuments, to report to the Seventh Session on "the possibility of establishing, by an international convention or by other appropriate means, an international fund for the maintenance of museums, monuments and collections possessed of universal interest". (Resolution 4.23).

A proposal for the drafting of such a convention had been submitted to the General Conference, at its Fifth Session, by the Mexican delegation (document 5C/PRG/22 and Add.). The proposal itself was the sequel to a series of Unesco enquiries and studies on the possibility of setting up an International Fund to subsidize maintenance and restoration work (cf. resolutions 6.42 and 6.43 of the Third Session of the General Conference; resolution 6.42 of the Fourth Session; and the report contained in document 5C/PRG/6, dated 27 March 1950).

Following discussion of the proposal, the General Conference, at its Fifth Session, authorized the Director-General to carry out a preliminary study on the possibility and advisability of adopting the proposed convention (resolution 4.45). The results of this preliminary study (document CL/452 and Annex) were circulated for comment to Member States on 20 December 1950. This document, while pointing out the urgent need for international measures to support the work undertaken by the various governments for the maintenance of their monuments and museum collections, drew attention to certain often very difficult questions on which it was essential to obtain the agreement of the States before embarking on the drafting of the proposed convention.

The comments of 18 Member States were analysed in two reports presented to the General Conference at its Sixth Session (document 6C/PRG/10 and Add. I). Three answers received after these reports had been prepared brought up no new considerations.

2. The present position

Three main conclusions may be drawn from the observations of Member States and international organizations on the Mexican proposal:

(1) The majority of the States which replied recognized the importance of the object which the proposed convention is designed to achieve, that is, the establishment of an International Fund to assist the maintenance of monuments and museums.

(2) But the means proposed for attaining this end (the introduction of a special tourist tax) was not viewed with favour.

(3) A number of States, and Switzerland in particular, suggested that the aim of international co-operation should be to provide technical, rather than financial, assistance.

In these circumstances, the International Committee on Monuments, Artistic and Historical Sites and Archaeological Excavations decided, at its second session, held in Paris from 1 to 5 October 1951, to take a lead from the Swiss delegation's proposal submitted to and approved by the General Conference at its Sixth Session.

The Committee's views were embodied in the following statement:

"The Committee, while it regretted that financial difficulties made it impossible to establish an international

fund for the preservation of historic monuments, supported the proposal that an urgent request should be made to the Director-General to continue, together with ICOM and an international committee of experts on which the Committee on Monuments should be represented, the work of establishing a central body which would collect documents, send out information, co-ordinate laboratory research and itself carry out research relating to the preservation of historic monuments and works of cultural value and publish the results. That body might work in conjunction with an existing national laboratory or one which might be specially founded and which could undertake research on any specific question, if necessary."

From these consultations and the General Conference's previous discussions, it therefore appears:

- (1) that the idea of introducing a special tourist tax will probably have to be abandoned;
- (2) that the original plan should be replaced by a more modest one for the establishment of an International Centre for the scientific study of the problems of preserving and restoring cultural property.

This report will deal briefly with three aspects of the question as thus narrowed down: the functions of the Centre, its legal and administrative organization, and the financial resources which may be available for its support.

II ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF THE PROBLEMS OF PRESERVING AND RESTORING CULTURAL PROPERTY

I. Problems of preservation and restoration

The establishment of a Centre for the study of the problems of preserving and restoring cultural property would be in line with one of the principal functions of Unesco as set forth in Article I of its Constitution, namely, that of "assuring the conservation and protection of the world's inheritance of books, works of art and monuments of history and science, and recommending to the nations concerned the necessary international conventions".

In the past, methods of preservation were based on trial and error. Modern scientific research has developed safer and more effective methods. It is unthinkable today that the treasures of our cultural inheritance - which often, in addition to their value for the mind, have an enormous material value - should continue to be subjected to forms of treatment which take no account of the latest advances of science.

With this in mind, certain countries have established specialized national institutions, but in so huge and varied a field, such institutions can deal only with a limited number of the problems involved in preservation work.

A Research Centre on the lines of the resolution of the International Committee on Monuments quoted above would allow of research at the international level which would increase the efficiency of work undertaken at the national level. It would also avoid overlapping and would stimulate international co-operation in the study of the most urgent problems. It would render invaluable services not only to States which have not sufficient resources to carry out such research work themselves, but also to those which have already undertaken action in this field. In these latter States, need is felt for the co-ordination of research work and the exchange of information about the experience gained, since the same fundamental problems and the same difficulties arise in every country. A few examples, representative of different subjects, will give a clearer idea of the questions which confront every country alike:

(a) Museum exhibits in general

Temperature and humidity conditioning of buildings. Museum lighting; new opportunities and dangers presented by the use of fluorescent lighting. Fire precautions. Treatment of stone which tends to scale off or crumble, consolidation of friable stones. Preservation of metals; study of protective glazes and varnishes. Preservation of organic matter; control of moulds, insects, parasitic fungi and plants; new methods of preserving textiles made possible by the development of research on plastics. Treatment of crumbling wood. Preservation of zoological collections.

(b) Works of art

Treatment of panels that have worn thin, removal of varnish and cleaning of pictures; study of varnishes, particularly synthetic varnishes. Methods of fixing the various layers of a painting, transposition of mural paintings.

(c) Historic monuments

Protection and consolidation of stone exposed to weathering; control of vegetation, this last problem being of the greatest importance for countries, such as India, Indonesia and Mexico, where the vegetation is luxuriant.

(d) Books and old documents

Methods of destroying insects and micro-organisms which infest libraries and record offices. Methods of consolidation, particularly by synthetic resins. Stabilization of inks. Preservation on microfilm.

These few examples will suffice to show the complexity of the problems and methods involved today in the care of cultural property.

2. Functions of the Centre

If a central institute for such research were to be set up, considerable material resources would therefore be required. Its equipment would be costly, and its staff, which would have to consist of specialists, would be difficult to recruit. For this reason it seems wiser to make the fullest possible use of existing national institutions and specialists and to set up a Research Centre, whose executive responsibilities would be of only secondary importance, the main emphasis being placed on the provision of information, the co-ordination and encouragement of research, and the training of technicians.

The principal functions of the Centre would thus be:

- (a) to provide information for curators, research workers and technicians;
- (b) to co-ordinate and encourage research work;
- (c) to carry out certain research work itself;
- (d) to train research workers and technicians.

(a) In order to be able to provide information, the Centre would have to:

- collect documentation about materials, their pathology, scientific methods of studying them, the techniques and processes for treating them, and the products to be used for the purpose;
- to circulate selected and annotated information and to publish it, either, as separate items, in a review such as Museum, or, when grouped together and forming a systematic study of the literature on a given subject, in a separate publication.

(b) In order to be able to co-ordinate and encourage research work, the Centre would have to:

- draw up a list of the problems to be solved, and classify them in order of importance and urgency;
- draw up a list of research laboratories, technical laboratories, workshops and departments concerned with the care of cultural property, as well as of international and national, university and private, scientific and technical, institutions capable of contributing to the research work which the Centre proposes to undertake;
- draw up, in co-operation with the institutions concerned, a programme for the rationalization of methods for the examination, analysis and supervision of cultural property;
- organize collaboration between institutions and experts throughout the world, help in co-ordinating their work, and promote their activities;
- collaborate with the International Committee on Monuments, the International Council of Museums and other appropriate scientific bodies in the preparation of a programme of research work to be carried out at the international level;
- organize scientific and technical studies and research in co-operation with the best qualified institution in each particular field;
- publish, or assist in publishing, the results of the work done.

(c) In order to carry out its own research work, the Centre would have to:

- establish relations with a scientific research and technical testing laboratory where it could carry out certain research work on the preservation of works of cultural value;
- publish and disseminate, in appropriate form, the results of such research work.

(d) In order to carry out its responsibilities in technical training, the Centre would have to:

- work out and put into execution a programme for the general and more advanced training of specialists;
- initiate and organize scientific and technical refresher courses;
- so far as lies within its power, furnish scientific and technical advice on cultural property and its care.

3. Organization of the Centre

Since the Centre could not adequately fulfil its responsibilities in connexion with documentation, information, co-ordination and training except as an international body, it would have to be set up by Unesco and function under its auspices.

More than one possibility might be considered with regard to its legal and administrative organization.

(1) The staff of the Centre might be provided by Unesco. Its activities would be incorporated into the programme of Unesco, and the Centre would be one of the Organization's departments. The Centre's independence would, in this case, be only such as derives from administrative decentralization, and would be limited to such powers as the Director-General could delegate to it. The preparation and execution of its programmes would have to be supervised by the Executive Board. It would be possible to give the Centre some budgetary independence, and to provide that it should be entitled to receive, not only appropriations voted by the General Conference, but also payments for services rendered and donations for special purposes. There is nothing in the Constitution of Unesco to prohibit such budgetary independence, but it would involve departures from the Financial Regulations and would consequently call for special decisions by the General Conference.

(2) Another solution would be to set up a body as a legal entity distinct from Unesco. A special agreement between Unesco and the Centre would define Unesco's supervisory rights over its administration. The Centre might also conclude agreements with other international or national organizations on assistance to research, the exchange of information and staff, the operation of common services and the granting of reciprocal facilities.

The International Computation Centre, which it has recently been decided to set up under Unesco's auspices, might serve as a precedent. In this case, the Centre would be an autonomous institution, set up by the States concerned, in co-operation with Unesco, under an international convention. States which were not founder members of the Centre would be able to accede to the Convention at a later date.

In order to keep down the initial outlay and running costs, it would be advisable to attach the Centre to an existing national institution, whose scientific and technical equipment the Centre would have the right to use. This institution should be chosen for its resources in staff, equipment and documentation, so that the Centre would immediately have the most efficient possible instruments at its disposal.

The host country would, furthermore, concede to the Centre the legal competency and privileges necessary for the carrying on of its work. The Centre should be able to acquire and dispose of property, conclude contracts, receive contributions and donations, administer funds and generally carry out any legal operations in keeping with its aims and functions. Officials of the Centre should have the status of international officials.

4. Financial resources of the Centre

Should the second alternative be adopted, the ordinary budget of the Centre would be derived from:

- (a) the annual contributions of the Member States of the institution;
- (b) payment for services rendered;
- (c) subventions, donations and legacies containing no clause contrary to the aims and functions of the Centre.

As with the International Computation Centre, the initial costs might perhaps be met by loans from the host country and Unesco or by a subvention approved by the General Conference of Unesco.

The initial costs of the proposed Centre would, in any case, be far smaller than those of the International Computation Centre, which needs extremely complex scientific apparatus. Provisional estimates suggest that the cost of installation, including a reserve fund, would not exceed \$30,000, and that the annual budget necessary for the subsequent operation of the Centre would be of the order of \$40,000 to \$50,000.

III CONCLUSION

The General Conference will be called on, at its Seventh Session, to take a decision in principle on the possibility and advisability of setting up a fund for the maintenance of museums, monuments and collections of universal interest, in the light of the enquiries and consultations carried out by the Secretariat. Since the results of the preliminary enquiries can hardly be called favourable to this solution, and particularly to the financing of the work by a tourist tax, the General Conference may prefer to consider the establishment of an International Centre for the study of the problems of preserving and restoring cultural property.

Were the General Conference to take such a decision, it might authorize the Director-General, in pursuance of the plan of work annexed to resolution 4.211 in the draft programme for 1953 and 1954, to study, in collaboration with the International Council of Museums, the consultative Committee on Monuments and other appropriate international organizations, the possibility of setting up a Research Centre of this kind. On the basis of such a study, a detailed report, possibly including a draft convention for the establishment of the Centre, might be submitted to the General Conference at its Eighth Session.