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ORGANISATION DES NATIONS UNIES POUR L'ÉDUCATION, LA SCIENCE ET LA CULTURE

GENERAL CONFERENCE - CONFÉRENCE GÉNÉRALE

FIFTH SESSION

CINQUIÈME SESSION

PROJECT FOR AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION
FOR THE PROTECTION OF HISTORIC MONUMENTS AND
ART TREASURES
SUBMITTED BY THE DELEGATION OF MEXICO

The Unesco Secretariat's Committee on Sites and Monuments has prepared for this Conference a detailed report entitled: "Measures for ensuring the co-operation of interested States in the protection, preservation and restoration of antiquities, monuments and historic sites; and possibility of establishing an international fund to subsidize such preservation and restoration".

This report contains the history of the interest aroused by the problem of international co-operation for the protection of historical monuments and art treasures and for the establishment of an international fund for this purpose.

The report is also based on the recommendations of the experts specially convened by Unesco, and on discussions with ICOM; it is emphasized (page 2) that, under Article I of the Organization's Constitution, Unesco has, since its foundation, made provision for, and recommended, the conclusion of international conventions for the protection of monuments and works of art.

The report submitted by the Secretariat gives a thorough and detailed analysis of the various possible forms of international co-operation in this field, and concludes with a recommendation that the General Conference should approve specified resolutions in Unesco's basic programme and in the draft programme for 1951.

The Mexican delegation entirely agrees that the above-mentioned resolutions should be approved, but believes it can suggest a more practical means of increasing the sums devoted by Unesco's Member States to the protection of their monuments and, at the same time, to the establishment of a substantial international fund; this would be placed at the disposal of Unesco's Committee on Sites and Monuments, making it possible to carry out the resolutions approved by the Committee of Experts and to fulfil one of the fundamental

purposes set forth in Article I of the Constitution of Unesco.

The Mexican delegation believes that a draft international convention is feasible, by which sufficient funds would be allotted, on a realistic basis, for the international protection of monuments, without thereby involving greater expenditure on the part of either the States or Unesco.

One of Unesco's objects, since the establishment of the Organization, has been to secure the protection of monuments of art and history, and, for this purpose, through the various States or through international co-operation, the Organization is examining, preserving and reconstructing these monuments, since it is rightly considered that they are not only the heritage of the people who have built them or in whose territory they are situated, but also a part of the cultural patrimony of mankind.

The destruction of one of these monuments by the forces of nature or the hand of man should be regarded as an irreparable loss for all people.

For this reason, the League of Nations and the United Nations resolved that these monuments should be protected by all possible means. Civilized states have afforded them protection to a greater or less degree but, unfortunately, never in the way recommended by all the international meetings of experts.

Moreover, there is no doubt that the history of peoples, their cultural development, and their struggles against want, fanaticism and tyranny are embodied, in the moral sphere, in laws and institutions and, in the material, in temples and palaces, tombs and castles, cities and isolated monuments, bearing witness to what was best in the individual or national deeds and achievements of the men who lived before us.

Such monuments are therefore the most eloquent testimony to a nation's culture and history; and, in our opinion, one of the truest and most effective ways of achieving international understanding is to foster a better knowledge of the way of life and the ideals of the various peoples and civilizations.

These ideas are, of course, not new to Unesco. The establishment of a Committee on Sites and Monuments was the outcome of the warm welcome given, from the first, to the idea that the cause of science and culture might be served by museums in their capacity of educational centres

and by the protection and preservation of monuments of art and history.

Up to the present, however, the activities of most governments in this connexion have not been so effective as might have been desired, either as regards the establishment of museums fitted to fulfil the above-mentioned educational functions or, as regards the exploration, preservation, and restoration of their monuments of art and history.

There seem to be two main reasons for this:

First, the shortage in most countries of the experts in all the branches of knowledge required in the organization of a modern museum or in the exploration, preservation and restoration of an ancient monument, and also a shortage of the laboratories and the experts needed for carrying out this scientific work.

The second, and perhaps the chief, reason is a lack of the economic means that are required to enable a country to maintain adequately its museums and its monuments of art and history.

The problem is particularly serious in those countries which suffered during the war a large-scale destruction of their sources of wealth (factories, railways, agricultural areas, highways, etc.) and of their museums and monuments.

The chief financial effort of those countries had perforce to be directed towards rapid economic recovery. The reconstruction of damaged monuments, the preservation and restoration of newly discovered monuments, and the installation or improvement of museums, had to wait.

Of the countries that have not suffered war damage, many possessing a rich cultural history and an abundance of monuments lack the financial means for their maintenance and are unable to save those that are falling into ruin or to provide for the scientific and artistic study of these jewels of the past that are the greatest riches in the national heritage.

The problem may thus be stated as follows:

(1) Monuments of art and history are the heritage of all mankind;

(2) It is to the advantage of all men, in all countries, that those monuments should be preserved for the future, explored and restored, and that museums should present, in

accordance with the newest techniques and with the concept of their educational function, collections showing the evolution of culture in each country and the main events in its history;

(3) There is a shortage of the experts and the well-equipped laboratories that are necessary for obtaining the scientific data needed in archaeological, artistic and historical investigations, in the exploration, preservation, and restoration of monuments, and in the proper classification of museum objects;

(4) Countries are forced by lack of funds to postpone maintenance work on their museums; they are also unable to build new museums or to improve the arrangements for the collections in existing museums.

PROPOSAL SUGGESTED

Since most countries are concerned to preserve their national monuments and this question is of interest to the whole world, we think that the best solution would be for Unesco to propose the adoption of an International Convention, the main points of which would be as follows:

(1) In order to obtain the necessary funds for exploring, preserving and restoring monuments and for establishing and improving museums, each signatory country would institute a tax of approximately three American dollars (equivalent to 1,000 French francs or 1,820 lire) to be paid, on entry into the country, by all persons who, under international law, are regarded as tourists.

(2) Payment of this tax would entitle the tourist to receive a card, upon exhibition of which he would be granted free entry to all national, state or municipal museums, and to picture galleries.

(3) The government of each signatory country would undertake to employ, either directly or through an institution established or authorized for that purpose, the whole of the funds thus collected for the purpose of exploring, preserving and restoring monuments and sites of archaeological, historical or artistic interest and for establishing, maintaining and assisting museums in which collections of objects of this nature are contained.

(4) The government of each signatory country would send Unesco's International Committee on Sites and Monuments, at half-yearly intervals, not less than twenty per cent of the amount received, during that half year, from the tax mentioned in paragraph 1 above.

(5) From the amounts received from the signatory countries, Unesco's International Committee on Sites and Monuments would establish a fund for the following purposes:

the publication of the review "Museum" in French, English, and Spanish; the provision of free technical advice for the signatory countries as regards physical, chemical, mineralogical, biological, and museographic investigations to be carried out in science institutions (universities, institutes, etc.) having suitable laboratories, or, if the volume and frequency of the advice so required, in laboratories of their own, to be established for the purpose; the interchange, free of all charges for the signatory countries, of professors and technicians, the permanent or occasional financing of courses in already existing schools or universities; the despatch of experts to carry out investigations in situ; fellowships for students of archaeology, history and art; organization and partial or complete financing of congresses, conferences and seminars; free delivery to signatory States of technical publications on pre-history, archaeology and art issued in other countries by official institutions; and, as a main object, contributions towards the search for and conservation and restoration of monuments, the exhibition of collections in museums and the publication of the results of investigations and explorations undertaken; all the foregoing being conditional on the contribution by the government concerned of not less than 50% of the funds required, on its submitting the plan for any work a reasonable time in advance and on such plans being approved by the Council of the International Committee on Sites and Monuments; and all other such forms of international co-operation as may be deemed expedient for the attainment of the ends sought.

A point to be borne in mind is the tendency for tourism to increase throughout the world in consequence both of easier communications and of the information about other countries circulated by the cinema, the radio and the press. Tourists want to acquaint themselves with whatever is most characteristic in each country, such as its monuments and the collections in its museums, and would accordingly make no difficulty about paying the impost suggested, which is insignificant in the case of each individual, but whose total yield might make it possible to achieve the international ideal of preserving the artistic and historical riches of mankind.

Moreover, there would be no reason why the governments of the States concerned should not devote sums larger than those yielded by the tax to the protection and restoration of monuments or the establishment of museums, and we are of opinion that many private individuals would be willing to contribute to the maintenance of a scientific and artistic

institution designed to preserve the national or international legacy of history.

On the other hand, States taking the view that they possessed no important monuments meriting preservation or the levying of the impost suggested, or those States without the resources to spare for such conservation, would merely abstain from signing the International Convention and would thus automatically be exempt from the obligation of instituting the impost and ineligible for the benefits afforded by international organizations for the protection of museums and monuments under the clauses of the Convention mentioned.

In submitting this project for Unesco's examination, the Mexican delegation considers that it is making a contribution to the protection and conservation of mankind's most precious treasure in the shape of its historical and artistic monuments, and accordingly asks for approval of the following:

CONCLUSION

The General Conference of Unesco recommends the adoption of an International Convention, under which signatory States would introduce an entry tax payable by tourists visiting the country. The yield of such tax to be set aside exclusively for the protection of monuments of art and history and for the encouragement of museums.

Signatory States would themselves pay contributions based on the yield of the tax aforesaid for the pursuit and achievement of the objects of the Unesco Committee on Sites and Museums.

Florence, May 1950.