

Submission to ICOFOM Regarding Consultation on the new Museum Definition

Submitted to: ICOFOM following its invitation to participate in the development of a new museum definition

Submitted by: The International Council of Museums Committee on Museums and Collections of Natural History (ICOM NATHIST) through Lynda Knowles, a board member of ICOM NATHIST

Date: Jan. 27, 2020

Cc: Dorit Wolenitz, ICOM NATHIST Board Chair

1. Comments on Proposed Definition:

"Museums are democratising, inclusive and polyphonic spaces for critical dialogue about the pasts and the futures. Acknowledging and addressing the conflicts and challenges of the present, they hold artefacts and specimens in trust for society, safeguard diverse memories for future generations and guarantee equal rights and equal access to heritage for all people. Museums are not for profit. They are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and social justice, global equality and planetary wellbeing."

Commenté [LHK1]: This is more a mission statement than a definition, reference to "pasts" and "futures" is vague and unclear. ICOM NATHIST suggests deleting.

Commenté [LHK2]: How does a museum collect and safeguard "memories?" How do you hold a museum accountable for this?

Commenté [LHK3]: How does a museum ensure "Equal rights and equal access" Who defines what that means?

Commenté [LHK4]: Too broad, too political and unrealistic –this and comments above are all directed to the same concern–language that is more in tune with a vision statement versus a practical working definition. ICOM NATHIST supports vision statements in formulating ICOM's (and ICOM NATHIST's) goals and expectations. A vision statement is not, however, a definition.

2. Draft ICOM NATHIST Proposed Definition

"Museums hold and care for artifacts and specimens. These artifacts and specimens are held in trust for society. Museums are not for profit. Many museums share a past where artifacts and specimens came into collections through exploitation of peoples and cultures. Today, (ICOM?) Museums reject these past practices and actively seek dialog and relationship-building with the peoples associated with their collections. Museums are participatory and transparent, and work in active partnership with and for diverse communities to ethically collect, preserve, research, interpret, exhibit, and enhance understandings of the world, aiming to contribute to human dignity and planetary wellbeing."

Thank you for this opportunity for ICOM NATHIST to submit its comments on this important work.