

Dear members of the Executive Board, dear colleagues,

It is with regret that I write to inform you about my decision to resign from my role as President of ICOM and member of the ICOM Executive Board.

The motives behind my decision are basically the growing dichotomy within the Executive Board, increasingly putting at risk the values I defend for ICOM as an international civil society organisation; and the hindering of my work at ICOM by the lack of solidarity on the part of the Director General.

Please find below and attached a detailed message that I would like to share with you.

With best wishes,

Istanbul, 19 June 2020

Dear colleagues,

Serving ICOM in various positions and as President, as well as, being part of this immense and diverse professional community has been one of the greatest honours in my life. All through my mandates I respected and defended the same values, even in the most challenging times: democracy, transparency, respect for diversity of opinions and different world views as well as defence of the true nature of an international non-governmental organisation, which is different from governing a museum or a museum organisation be it local, national or regional.

I do not think we are strange or unknown to each other. Nor are we foreign or blind to what has been happening within our inner structures with all the implications on and reflections within the Executive Board and the ICOM Secretariat.

This is why, I am allowing myself to take this direct stand, without reducing my concerns to technicalities or remaining within ambiguous or general statements. I will not either pretend that the current state we are in can be explained just by disagreements or differences of political views. These, I would regard as the richness of an organisation like ours. But this is not where we are, the issues go far deeper. Please accept my frankness as a sign of respect.

I was elected President of ICOM in 2016 for my distinctive civil society experience, including my previous mandates as Chair of CAMOC and Chair of the Advisory Council, for not having adherence to any particular agenda other than that of my mandate, for being independent of any affiliation and being totally dedicated to ICOM and ICOM's values. My election was a clear sign of the trust our members had in my capacity to defend these principles and to lead ICOM towards a more progressive path. I believe I accomplished this and I was elected for a second mandate in 2019.

Yes, this objective was highly achieved during my first mandate, thanks to the support of the Executive Board members. I am delighted to say that in those three

years ICOM got involved in the topical issues of sustainability and the UN Social Development Goals, led the global discussion on museum definition, promoted the social role of museums and the 2015 UNESCO Recommendation through museum and society projects and continued its trademark activities in heritage protection and capacity building, as well as improved its partnerships and added new ones. I sincerely thank the members of the former Executive Board for walking this road of remarkable achievements with me and for their enthusiasm. I thank the new members who have recently joined the current board for their support in furthering these achievements.

But things have changed. A lot is happening within and outside our organisation and I fear we are missing the spirit of the time. The museum field as well as our organisation is experiencing a paradigm shift. I would normally see it as an opportunity for an organisation like ours to be challenged with such strong societal dilemmas: sustainability/climate change, decolonisation, increasing inequalities, conservatism and populism. And now we are witnessing the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and the struggles of disregarded communities for racial equality. All eventually impacting the definition. But today, in fact since the dawn of Kyoto, it has become more a missed opportunity for us as we have refrained from taking any action and moving forward.

I have always regarded museums as embedded within society, not beside or aside it. Now it feels like we are becoming more and more self-centred, our minds occupied with self-interests, focused on our own sustainability rather than the sustainability of the whole which we are a part of. Can we have any relevance if we are so detached from the communities we want to serve? The pragmatic and hesitant role that the Executive Board assumed for the most part on the way to, during and in the aftermath of Kyoto led us to an unhealthy working environment in which obscuring values through technicalities have become a part of the working culture. Was this due to the conservative comments from closer professional networks or was it because of future expectations and individual agendas?

I wonder if those who have repeatedly warned us of a potential division within our organisation were aware that they were actually serving this potential danger of splitting our unity. And, we did not find the right tone to respond to those threats arising from inside and outside of our group. I do not mind feeling alone and being left alone in dealing with these but I find it extremely difficult to say that I can approve the actions of those who have been contributing to the aggravation of these problems instead of being part of a solution. Hence my disappointment with the lack of solidarity on the part of the Director General.

Finally, with the MDPP resignations as with Leontine Meijer-Van Mensch's resignation from the Executive Board and then with the way the EB members reacted to and analysed the answers to the question we asked and collected from the MDPP2 members, I have been observing with regret and inquietude that the Executive Board once again takes an active position to remain passive and avoid self-criticism. Instead of questioning our own unhealthy stance based on distrust and lobbying, as a group we are projecting all our internal problems to the MDPP2 as if the issues are internal to this committee and have nothing to do with us.

I have always taken pride in being part of a group that aims to learn and grow. I would like to believe that my resignation, together with the feedback that our Executive Board recently received from many others, will serve the inner growth of our organisation starting with the Executive Board itself and eventually with positive impacts on the administration of the Secretariat.

Please accept this letter as my final contribution to the Executive Board as its President for putting the record right and an opportunity to reiterate that for me leadership is not a position but an attitude. I sincerely hope my decision will contribute to the common good of our organisation to which my commitment remains as solid as ever and I wish you the best in your future work for ICOM.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Suay Aksoy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the beginning.

Suay Aksoy
President of International Council of Museums (ICOM)