



*Open letter to Ministers of Culture of UNESCO Member and Observer States*

8 September 2022

Subject: MONDIACULT: Ambitious Cultural Policy for a Changing Climate

Excellencies,

As members of the Climate Heritage Network and leaders of diverse cultural organisations, we are deeply concerned that the institutional framework of cultural policy, with UNESCO at its core, must do more to provide the guidance, leadership, and decisions required to unlock the power of culture, from arts to heritage, to enable transformative climate action. We write to express our strong conviction that the opportunity presented by MONDIACULT 2022 to advance these aims must not be missed.

Each of us stands warned by scientists, Indigenous Peoples, civil society – even our own children – about the increasingly catastrophic consequences of biodiversity loss and climate change. Earlier in 2022, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the world was on a “fast track” to disaster and that we risk rendering planet Earth “uninhabitable.” Climate scientists say that the 2020s will be critical and that it is “now or never” to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, including major cities under water, extinction of a million species of plants and animals, and irreversible loss of culture and heritage.

It has been forty years since the original 1982 MONDIACULT declared that the objective of human development was not “production” or “consumption” but human well-being; 30 years since the Rio Earth Summit launched the UNFCCC to combat “dangerous human interference with the climate system” by stabilizing atmospheric greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations; and six years since the Paris Agreement ushered in an all-of-society effort to tackle climate change. Yet despite these efforts, GHG emissions continue to increase, and transformative adaptation remains a distant prospect for many. Secretary General Guterres has called the status quo a “damning indictment of failed climate leadership.”

Precisely how has climate leadership failed? A growing critique points to the scarcity of social imaginaries capable of conceiving plausible low carbon, just, climate resilient futures; a climate policy ecosystem that validates existing, technocratic approaches while marginalizing rights-based, place-based, demand-side, and people-centred strategies; and the need to better include diverse voices and perspectives in climate governance. In short, to an appreciable degree, what is missing from climate action is attention to culture and heritage, and to the socio-cultural enabling conditions of transformative climate action.

This is a problem that you as Ministers of Culture are uniquely qualified to help solve. The UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, MONDIACULT 2022, is meant to be “a renewed reflection on cultural policies to tackle global challenges and outline immediate and future priorities.” We believe climate change and biodiversity loss are defining challenges of our time, requiring an ambitious and comprehensive treatment in cultural policy commensurate with the magnitude of the climate emergency itself. The Climate Heritage Network and Culture 2030 Goal Campaign made suggestions for doing so in their March 2022 [ResiliArt/MONDIACULT submission](#).

At this point, what is of transcendent importance is that the final MONDIACULT Declaration provides a clear and forward-looking vision, building on recent key #ClimateHeritage policies. In this regard, a useful example can be found in Articles 3.2 and 19 of the Rome Declaration from the 2021 G20 Culture Ministers’ Meeting , which read:

3.2 Acknowledging that culture, including intangible and tangible cultural heritage, creativity, Indigenous peoples’ and local communities’ languages, wisdom and knowledge systems and traditional crafts and materials, especially those used by Indigenous and local women, offer great potential to **drive climate action and sustainable development and contribute meaningfully to climate solutions. Culture-led mitigation [and] adaptation...can leverage Action for Climate Empowerment towards an inclusive and sustainable, prosperous climate and nature-positive future, taking into account different national circumstances and contributing to the goals of the Paris Agreement.**

19. We recognise culture’s role and its potential in leading to solutions to address climate change. We will strive to **build resilient societies, facilitate targeted research and increased scientific cooperation on the reciprocal effects of climate change and culture, upscale cultural dimensions into climate change policies, and to mainstream cultural considerations into the global climate agenda...**

We urge you to build on the bolded Rome Declaration language above in order to outline in the final MONDIACULT Declaration an ambitious vision for how cultural policy can help people imagine and realise low carbon, just, climate resilient futures; and achieve climate resilient sustainable development.

In just two months, every sector of society, every UN agency, will assemble in Sharm el-Sheikh Egypt for the 2022 UN Climate Conference (COP27). Our hope is that, through your actions at Mexico City, those who represent the culture sector at COP27 can point with pride to the final MONDIACULT Declaration as evidence of our shared commitment to claim a seat at the table of ambitious climate leadership.

Sincerely,

Silja Fischer, Secretary General, International Music Council (IMC)  
Davide Grosso, President of the NGO-UNESCO Liaison Committee  
Claire McGuire, Policy and Research Officer, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions  
Emma Nardi, President of ICOM (International Council of Museums)  
Jordi Pascual, Coordinator, UCLG Culture Committee  
Teresa Patricio, President of ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites)  
Gabriel Caballero, ICOMOS Focal Point for the SDGs  
Cathy Daly, School of Humanities & Heritage, University of Lincoln, UK

Kh. Mahfuz-ud-Darain, General Secretary, ICOMOS Bangladesh  
Hannah Fluck, Vice Chair (Europe), Climate Heritage Network  
Gauri Ivette García Medina, Investigadora, Restauradora y actualmente ocupa un puesto de  
Directora de Patrimonio Protección y Conservación de Monumentos y Sitios Históricos en  
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Mauro García Santa Cruz, Coordinador, Iniciativa Patrimonio y Cambio Climático, Argentina  
Cornelius Holtorf, Chairholder, UNESCO Chair on Heritage Futures, Linnaeus University, Sweden  
Tchan Ibrahim, Écomusée Tata Somba, Bénin  
Emma Jenkins, Director of the Institute for Modelling Socio-Environmental Interactions  
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Albino Jopela, African World Heritage Fund, South Africa  
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