

Opening remarks

Beate Reifenscheid, chair of ICOM Germany

Good morning everyone and *kalimera* to Greece.

In a way, we are very glad to gather for this conference at least online, because of course when we started planning this joint meeting with ICOM Greece and ICOM Cyprus, we thought that we would actually meet in Athens. This would have been a great chance, not only to be there, share our topics, concerns and visions, but also to visit the museums on-site and to meet physically our, I would like to say, ICOM family.

These days are very difficult for each and every one of us personally, but even more so for the museums, for culture. We are facing the pandemic and all its concomitant problems, but we are also facing tremendous discussions about the value of culture nowadays. To close a museum, what does it mean with all consequences? And what does it mean for those who are less or no longer involved into cultural activities anymore? The only thing we can do is going online. But this should not be the future for us. So, looking at today's conference, the topic couldn't be more precise and more actual than it is right now. We had no idea that we would be acting within a pandemic for real when we chose the subject and considered how to deal with pandemics, how to stop the loss of biodiversity and how to improve sustainability especially in museums. That *was* our task, and now, stronger than ever, it *is* our task to effectively act. Therefore, I am very grateful that we managed to come together today, at least online.

I hope we will draw good conclusions out of our very important keynotes for today. They reflect parts of the current planetary crises which are affecting museums as well. We were also thinking about ways to deal with physical collections and how to present them in a

broader and open way digitally. What we experience these days is that digital tools and digital communication are the only opportunities left to share our thoughts – and the good side of all this is that we can share even more than we ever have done before. This is one of the few good points arising from the experiences we go through at the moment. At the end of this day, I hope we will find some answers – if we have the chance to develop them, and I'm quite sure that we shall find methods on how to reinvent the museums in the face of planetary emergency. I believe that the crucial question is how to deal with those answers.

In times of multiple crises, not only the crisis of nature but also of the social changes, of numerous refugee influxes, religious differences and terrorist conflicts, the problems for our global community are growing exponentially. We need to develop common strategies for handling them and to find out how we want to strengthen our museums for the future. As museums, we are part of the answer, since we are eager to address the challenges and problems and serve as a think tank for the societies. More than ever before, we are faced with the urgent task of protecting our museums and their collections, and preparing them conscientiously for the coming difficulties and challenges. Moreover, we have to develop answers for future crises and changes. I believe we need to get closer, to learn from each-other, and to join more directly, thus strengthening our museums for the society. We have to serve the society, but we also have to deal with the answers. I'm very hopeful that we will find some future ideas and strategies in order to face these problems. I'm really keen on listening to the next contributors to the conference. I would like to thank once again my colleagues from Greece and Cyprus and thank you as well to the moderators to bring us through the whole day.