

20/12/23

Dear ICOM Executive Board members,

As individual and institutional members of ICOM, ICOM Israel is deeply concerned about recent statements taken from a third party shared on ICOM's official Facebook and Instagram pages, asserting that over 100 heritage sites in Gaza were damaged due to bombing. [Links to posts: [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)].

In addition to the tragic loss of human life and the unfolding humanitarian crisis, ICOM Israel acknowledges the significant issue of cultural heritage damage in the region since October 7th. However, the social media posts made from the ICOM's official account deviate from professional and academic standards, offering a one-sided and short-sighted perspective. We urgently request the removal of these posts and a clear condemnation of Hamas, a terrorist organization actively contributing to current aggression and ongoing damage to cultural sites and projects on both sides of the border.

Our primary concerns with the post include its reliance on unfounded information, its exclusive attribution of damage to bombing, its failure to address the ongoing damage and cynical use of heritage sites by Hamas—knowing Israel will avoid targeting such locations—and its disregard for the broader impact on heritage sites, museums, galleries, natural reservations, and cultural institutions within Israel since October 7th.

Specific points of concern:

1. The report on which the statement is based is preliminary, with uncorroborated numbers issued by Palestinian authorities, often proven incorrect in previous instances.
2. The report acknowledges the involvement of activists in its compilation, individuals with a vested interest and lacking credible

- professionalism. The ongoing conflict makes it challenging to verify and cross-reference information, yet ICOM posted the report without adhering to accepted standards.
3. Contradictions within the report, including the mention of 14 impacted sites, a list of 25 sites by name, and a later list of 104 sites without specific information, raise serious questions about its accuracy.
 4. The absence of reliable dates and causes for the reported damage is particularly concerning, especially considering the blatant misreporting of the incident involving Al-Shifa hospital on Nov. 10th.

Furthermore, the statement overlooks substantial damage to regional heritage caused by Hamas. The tunnelling activities of Hamas have undoubtedly inflicted severe damage on all underground remains of both past and current sites it has also cause for the structural weakening of structures above ground. Assessing the full extent of this damage will likely take decades. It is well-documented that Hamas exploits cultural heritage sites, among other locations, for military purposes, strategically selecting locations with the expectation that Israel will hesitate to target them. This cynical approach raises profound ethical and legal concerns.

ICOM must also acknowledge that since October 7th, numerous museums and cultural heritage sites in Israel have suffered damage from Hamas strikes. Notable among them are the Be'eri Gallery of Art, Nir-am Museum, archaeological display rooms in the Kibbutzim, and the Yad-Mordechai Museum. The ongoing situation is poised to have a lasting impact on the region's ability to carry on cultural activities long after the conflict subsides.

We wish to also draw attention to the case of Mr. Haim Perry, an 80-year-old artist, curator, and peace activist. Mr. Perry worked with the Be'eri Gallery and founded the White House Gallery, both of which were completely destroyed on Oct. 7th along with the artworks they housed. He was forcibly abducted from his home and is presumed a hostage for over 74 days now in Gaza

without access to lifesaving medical care. The Red Cross yet to have gained access to visit him and aid is condition.

Until October 7th, a ceasefire was in effect between Israel and Gaza. While we share concerns for the region's future, the well-being of its people, and the preservation of cultural heritage, ICOM's statement cannot be endorsed. ICOM should exercise responsibility in its posts, striving to uphold cultural values instead of fueling tensions and provoking further animosity. For the sake of our collective efforts in museum development and cultural heritage, and regional collaboration, we request the immediate removal of the posts and a formal apology.

Thank you for your response,

Sincerely,

Raz Samira, chair, ICOM Israel

And ICOM Israel Board members