

The National and International Committees that have signed this statement express our disagreement with the edited and reinterpreted wording of the minutes of the Extraordinary General Assembly held in Kyoto on September 7, 2019.

We demand that the minutes be literal as indicated by good democratic and transparency practices, so the document in question must be sent with the recordings of the Extraordinary General Assembly attached so that we can rectify and respect the will and thoughts expressed by the members of ICOM represented in this assembly as the highest sovereign body of the organization.

Interpretations of what is expressed change meaning and distort reality, such as the brief summary made of the text read by Jette Sandahl. In the minutes it summarizes what Sandahl said in the following way:

“She pointed out the change the new definition would induce, and stated that, while the text necessarily called for adaptation and revision, the primary purpose of articulating a new definition is to propose change through a pragmatic tool for the international museum community.”

Fortunately, we have Jette’s text. Rather than signaling “the change the new definition would induce,” what she pointed out was, “With the rapid and continuous changes in societies around us, the current museum definition seems more and more lacking, more and more inadequate in guiding and supporting museums in finding our way in the complex responsibilities and the almost endless challenges and opportunities that we face in the 21st century.” She continues by explaining each of the 8 parameters adopted to structure a new definition, reflecting on how these were arrived at from consultation with museum professionals worldwide. These parameters range from preserving traditional museum functions to the need for “these core functions [to be] contextualized ... to have these functions anchored in an ethical base of clearly expressed values and purposes.” Present within the parameters as well is the notion that “if we want to have a shared global museum definition, we need to understand and relate to the vast differences in world views, in contexts and conditions under which museums work across the globe.”

After her brief run through of the parameters, Sandahl states, “Over the last decades, we have seen a real shift in how museums have come to see the traditional, collection-based museum functions as a unity with the larger social or societal obligations. This shift is, of course uneven, across regions, but there is a clear and shared ambition much bigger than just being ‘open to public’, as the current museum definition says.” Rather than imply that a new definition proposes a change in museums, Sandahl reiterates throughout her statement that museums have changed, and what is inadequate is the museum definition.

The misrepresentation of Sandahl’s message is a clear example of what we consider to be a problematic distortion of the events.

Another case we can point to is the editing of the comment by Jean Paul Koudougou from Burkina Faso and the omission of the comment by Stephanie Wintzerith, secretary of the Nominations and Elections Committee, said that "voting against the proposed new definition is a signal to the rest of the world that ICOM is formed by reactionaries who reject change."

For the approval of the minutes of the Kyoto EGA, they must be corrected, reflecting fidelity to the facts and expressions of the representative members.

Along these same order, we request that this document be shared with all the accredited representative members for the next 35th General Assembly before next July 20.

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