

July 23rd, 2020

Open letter to the ICOM Executive Board

With much concern we read yesterday the Executive Board Internal Review, unsigned, but supposedly written by the Executive Board (EB) itself.

As the EB once again positions the MDPP(2) at the core of the current crisis in ICOM, in the name of organizational openness and transparency, we think it would have been fair to inform us that we would be thus singled out, and relevant to hear us so that our most important concerns could be reflected as other than underlying assumptions and a tendentious selection of arguments.

The EB chooses to see only a single 'long shadow cast after Kyoto'. For some members and committees equally long and equally deep shadows were cast by the deviation from established ICOM procedures, by a dubious legal interpretation that allowed a change in what could be voted on, and by the withholding of the information that there could indeed be adaptations to the agenda or the text for the vote at the Extraordinary General Assembly. A real review would not leave these other 'long shadows' unrecognized. It would not minimize or disregard serious disagreements, but try at least to understand, if not respect, opposing views, in order to comprehend why ICOM finds itself in a situation of, as the text says, 'a spate of resignations'.

A real review would also recognize that resignation for people like us is an absolute last resort, and cannot be disregarded as frivolous or based in inadequate or faulty codes of conduct. A resignation is an act of impotence and an indication that one has given up hope of having a voice. When an organization like ICOM experiences a series of interconnected resignations, from within the highest level of elected governance and appointed experts, an EB cannot exonerate itself that it had not been 'advised' of the severity or the magnitude of the underlying issues. If the ICOM EB was indeed, as it claims, surprised by the resignation of their President, of fellow EB members, of MDPP2 chair and members, that surprise in itself should cause EB members to question their own level of attention and due diligence?

The absence of real self-reflections in this so called internal review shows how essential and urgent an external, dispassionate and professional review is, and how important it is for such a review to involve members on all levels, strands and realms of the organization. We support the request for such an external review made by a number of ICOM committees, and, as we have said before, are more than willing to contribute in any way relevant.

Finally, let us express our uneasiness over some of the conclusions drawn and solutions proposed. At a time in history when digital platforms allow an unprecedented democratization of information and dialogue, we question the ICOM EB's and DG's strategy of reducing members' access to relevant information about internal discussions. And while we, as we believe all ICOM members do, value and respect loyalty and confidentiality, we think it is a very unfortunate point of time right now, when the lines of power, disagreement and dissent are so deeply entangled and contested in ICOM, to tighten the central control of communication and to highlight and reiterate the threat of exclusion from membership.

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