



May 16, 2016

Executive Committee,
Warsaw International Mechanism for
Loss and Damage

Re: Call for Information Related to Migration, Displacement and Human Mobility

Dear Executive Committee members,

I am writing on behalf of the Arctic Institute in response to the call that was released by the Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage for information related to migration, displacement, and human mobility.

As someone who has worked extensively in the Arctic region and now across the United States and US territories on loss and mobility related to climate change, I strongly urge the Executive Committee to take the cultural heritage of displaced persons and communities into account when drafting an international policy framework.

Throughout 2016 and 2017, I am traveling across the United States and US Territories to interview over 200 coastal leaders, community members, and families on relocation related to climate change. The project, [*America's Eroding Edges*](#), is partnered with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Geographic Science and Expedition Committee. It will create a qualitative database of how climate change, erosion, and sea level rise are affecting coastal communities' cultural heritage, livelihoods, and social safety networks. The research will be made publically available through the National Trust for Historic Preservation website, in addition to peer-reviewed papers and an academic book.

When asked about climate change, most community members I have interviewed quickly move beyond the financial cost and economic loss of relocation to focus instead on how environmental changes are disrupting their historic livelihoods, language, culture, identity, and futures. In communities I have worked with in American Samoa, the Chesapeake Bay, and Alaska, as in the rest of the world, climate change relocation is, at its core, a story about environmental changes affecting communities' ways of knowing and living in the world – a diverse set of tangible and intangible cultural heritage assets that have defined people and place for centuries.

Cultural heritage is not only a local history and way of life to be conserved for dislocated persons. It is also a tool that can aid in the development of strong, socially cohesive communities once relocated and an important resource for humans across the world to value and learn from each other.

Andrew Potts, Executive Director of the United States National Committee of the International Council on Monuments and Sites (US/ICOMOS), and have organized a working group to discuss, synthesize, and collectively address the issues that arise in the intersection of cultural



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heritage, climate change, and mobility. Our Working Group includes policymakers, heritage professionals, archaeologists, historians, paleoecologists, environmental modelers, scientists, and local community members directly impacted by rapid global change. Our focus is on mobilizing a response to global scale threats to heritage, science, and the human condition by connecting internationally and bridging disciplinary boundaries to promote a more effective response to urgent threats that will contribute to community health and viability as well as rescuing unique world heritage and scientific data key to understanding past and future global change impacts. Our work is strongly rooted in the *Pocantico Call to Action on Climate Impacts and Cultural Heritage*, a platform for policymakers, practitioners, and concerned citizens around the world to come together to discuss the impacts of climate change on cultural heritage.

Over the past few weeks, members of this group have submitted cultural heritage publication and information in response to your call. I hope that you find these submissions helpful and that the Committee gives them full consideration. Collectively, we feel strongly that the policy framework for addressing climate displacement must move beyond traditional conversations on loss and damage to include the cultural heritage that is not only of importance to displaced people and their communities, but all of humanity.

With warm wishes,

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