

OPEN LETTER TO THE BRAZILIAN MUSEUM COMMUNITY

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF MUSEUMS | May 18, 2020

We are celebrating the International Museum Day 2020, with the theme **Museums for equality: diversity and inclusion**, during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Brazil. Amidst so many digital activities in museums countrywide, we ask for a moment of silence. Silence for the suffering from losses and the anguish from uncertainties. Silence, as a collective reflection, to rethink the values we all have in common and actions museums may take on to enable us to get through this global crisis.

In Brazil, the COVID-19 crisis is also a manifestation of profound social inequality and the lack of support for precarious workers and the most impoverished ones. Museums - following WHO guidelines - remain closed and face the challenge of economic losses, reduced work hours, layoffs and the weakening of its infrastructure. Most professionals are confined, but there are workers in essential functions, such as conservation, safety and maintenance, who continue to risk their lives to protect our heritage. We pay them tribute and we are especially grateful on this symbolic date.

In this moment of crisis, museums must seek to protect their professionals - several of them specialized technicians -, as well as serving as a platform for the aspirations and needs of their communities and territories. In times of storm, museums can help us - with power – to resist, activating memories, reminding us of who we really are and what our values are; recording the present, the challenges of daily confinement, mourning, and the social transformation we are living in; and projecting the future after the crisis. That future starts now, and solidarity will be essential to build a more egalitarian, diverse and inclusive world. In this National Museums Week we propose that Brazilian museums be guided by the principle of solidarity, to its professionals, families and to society as a whole.

Museums must rethink their function facing the economic impact and the huge inequality abyss exposed among us, recognizing its responsibility for regenerating Brazil socially and culturally. There is no way to continue existing under the backing of a social elite, awaiting public funding. Since the Roundtable of Santiago de Chile, almost 50 years ago, museum professionals in Latin America systematically and profitably discuss the social role of museums. Over the last decade, we have observed the establishment of small and powerful museums of vulnerable communities, such as favelas, quilombos and indigenous museums. It is in this diverse and plural context, that the State must protect and support museum institutions continuously, establishing policies, providing means and resources.

It is essential and urgent that museums are focused on welcoming citizens and the collective well-being. Museums are relevant and powerful contemporary institutions, active in the preservation and research of its collections and in the communication with its audiences.

Amid the profound impacts of this crisis, Brazilian museums can lead solidarity and citizenship and deepen the relationship within their territories, connecting their collections and programs with the desires, needs and interests of communities.

We need to reconfigure the museum experience for the community, in the community, with the community, in a socially inclusive and economically sustainable way. As we learned from Ailton Krenak, to fight this virus, to think about another possible world, we must first be careful and then have courage.