**Memorial Museums in the time of COVID-19**

*(Webinar of the International Committee of memorial museums for the remembrance of the victims of public crimes (ICMEMO), April 28,*

*2020)*

Introduction

Good morning, good afternoon and good evening and welcome to our participants in five continents and numerous time-zones at this, the first webinar organised by the International Committee of memorial museums for the remembrance of the victims of public crimes, part of the International council of museums (ICOM).

We are grateful for your response to our invitation. We want to spend an hour together on the theme of Memorial Museums in the time of COVID-19. Reflection, Response, and Creative Strategies for the Future.

I am Kornelis Spaans, ICMEMO and I am your moderator. Our apologies for not being able to offer interpretation of this meeting. Everything will have to be said and done in the English language.

We are all affected by this deadly virus that originates in Wuhan, China, but all to varying degrees. It rather depends on where you are in the world, on your age, the means or absnece thereof to defend yourself against this virus, whether you are dealing with an unpleasant inconvenience that will pass or with a deadly menace that is a direct threat to you and your loved ones. In the latter case one is reminded of the plight of the Yezedi, victims of genocide by the Islamic State, in a dreadful situation and with few defenses against this virus.

As memorial museums who commemorate victims of genocides and similar atrocities we are sensitive to how social strain may develop into conflict and confrontational societies. A threat like this may bring people together for a while but it may also help to create an environment in which people feel scared and abandoned. And in which politicians and opaque bureaucracies of different shapes and sizes instrumentalise this virus threat for their purpose.

In the last few months we see democracies and not so democracies establish political and economic straightjackets through the restriction of civil liberties and freedom and through information adjustment without so much as a whisper. All for a good cause. We, as memorials, are aware of how these things start, and perhaps end, not necessarily with a loud bang and boots on the streets, but almost as a matter of course. We see in some countries an age-discrimination emerge against the elderly that in its matter of factness quite closely resembles dictatorships of the past that considered certain groups and segments of society as surplus to requirements.

We are all affected, professionally and personally. We want to use this opportunity as memorial museum professionals to get together and benefit from each others thoughts. We have asked four speakers from different parts of the world, Nigeria, Bangladesh, The Netherlands and Slovenia to present their thoughts: two of them to describe how they manage the crisis, and two whose museums have come up with some new approaches.

We have one hour and five speakers: each of them will speak for about 6 minutes. We shall then have about 15 minutes for questions and answers. With so many participants, the system will not be able to handle questions asked through our microphones, so please ask your question using the Q and A button at the bottom of the screen. You can do that while the speakers are speaking. Please include your name and e-mail. The whole webinar will be available online in streaming in a few days. So please keep an eye on our website and facebook.

Many museums have already had to close as part of national lockdowns. A number of them now offer virtual tours of their collections. All are struggling and looking for creative solutions.

*1.The effects of COVID-19 on Museums around the world*

Louisa Onuoha, National Commssion of Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, Lagos

Mofidul Hoque, Founder and Director, Liberation War Museum, Dhaka, Bangladesh  
  
*2. Creative, alternative means to reach our audience*

Kaja Sirok, Director of the National Museum of Contemporary History, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Teresien Da Silva, Head of collections of Anne Frank House, Amsterdam, Netherlands  
  
*3. Digital Strategies & Emergency Planning. Available Resources*  
Ophelia Leon, ICMEMO Chair  
  
Moderator: Kornelis Spaans, ICMEMO

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