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# International Memorial Museums Charter

**This is an international memorial museums charter that is oriented both towards the UN declaration of Human Rights and the ethical principles of ICOM. General principles of commemoration in memorial museums are:**

- 1.** A joint culture of remembrance cannot and must not be dictated by decree. Given the very different historical experiences, memorial museums should accept the co-existence of different commemorative imperatives that are aimed at pluralistic cultures of remembrance. Institutions should be designed for cooperation instead of encouraging competition which can create a struggle for dominance. Should this be a practical venture, a joint culture of remembrance could develop gradually out of a multitude of decentralized initiatives.
- 2.** A pluralistic culture of remembrance also requires a shared set of positive values. These already exist in the universal declaration of human and civil rights.
- 3.** Memorial museums as contemporary history museums are involved mostly in remembering public crimes committed against minorities. This is why current states, governments, and local communities bear a great responsibility to memorial museums and should safeguard their collections and assure them the highest degree of independence from political directives. At the same time the memorial museums have to anchor themselves broadly within civil society and make a special effort to integrate minorities.
- 4.** Modern memorial museums are contemporary history museums with a special obligation to humanitarian and civic education. The memorial museums will only be able to assert themselves against political interests and lobbyists if they have achieved a high level of quality work, infrastructure, and personal organization.
- 5.** Fundamental decisions in the memorial museums concerning content, education and design should be made mostly on the basis of an open, non-hierarchical pluralistic discussion with survivors, scholars, educators, lobbyists, and committed social groups. The work of memorial museums is principally science based. State-run institutions and private sponsors have to accept this.
- 6.** Information conveyed in exhibitions, publications and educational projects about historical events should evoke empathy with the victims as individual humans and groups which were specifically targeted for persecution. Interpretation should avoid commemoration in the form of revenge, hate and resentments between different groups of victims.
- 7.** Historical experiences have to be integrated into historical contexts without minimizing the personal suffering of individuals. The integration of historical events should take place on the level of modern contemporary historical research and honor the scholarly principles of discourse and multiple perspectives.
- 8.** The perspective of the perpetrators who committed the crimes has to be addressed. The perpetrators should not be demonized, but rather their ideology, aims and motives should be used to explain their actions. This includes the institutional and social mechanism as well as the individual biographies of perpetrators. The ability to question one's own perspective also takes into account the inclusion of one's own crimes and self-images into the presentation of the "other." The broad and very diverse group of bystanders should be handled in the same manner.
- 9.** Memorial museums located at historically authentic sites where crimes were committed provide an immense opportunity for conducting historical and civic education, but there are also big risks involved. This is why memorial museums need to orient their educational work less towards an agreement about the content and more towards universal principles. These demand that the visitors are not overwhelmed or indoctrinated, that the subjective view of individuals is respected, and that controversial subjects are treated as controversial.
- 10.** Memorial museums as contemporary history museums are always engaged in selfcriticism of their own history, and have to embed it in a history of their respective remembrance culture. Cognizant of current trends of thinking, they should gear their presentations towards current interpretations of the past, while being anchored to the actual historical events.

**International Committee of Memorial Museums for the Remembrance of Victims of Public Crimes ♦ le Comité international pour les musées à la mémoire des victimes de crimes publics ♦ Comité Internacional de los Museos Conmemorativos de las Víctimas de Crímenes Públicos. Charter approved at the 10th annual membership meeting of IC-MEMO, Paris, October 2011**