



# ICA INDIGENOUS MATTERS SUMMIT

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CHALLENGING AND  
DECOLONISING  
THE ARCHIVE

**EGIM**  **ICA**

Expert Group on Indigenous Matters  
Groupe d'Experts sur les Affaires Autochtones

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## TANDANYA – ADELAIDE DECLARATION

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We, the International Council on Archives Expert Matters Indigenous Group, hailing from across the world, in the inaugural ICA Indigenous Matters Summit, held in Adelaide, South Australia, on Friday 25 October 2019, at the invitation of the President of the International Council on Archives, Mr David Fricker, hereby present the following Adelaide Summit Declaration. We call on the jurisdictional archives of the world to acknowledge and adopt the themes and commitments of the Declaration for immediate action.

### PREAMBLE

The International Council on Archives (ICA) is the pre-eminent international body devoted to the understanding and care of archival heritage. The ICA recognizes the need to preserve valued collective memory is part of the human condition. It is a pillar of our common humanity. As the ICA's Universal Declaration on Archives states, "Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another ... Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life."<sup>1</sup>

Centuries of imperial and colonial state expansion are another component of our common humanity. This expansion transplanted colonial settler states into diverse global locales creating new relationships with local Indigenous societies. Indigenous dispossession, assimilation and genocide have characterized these colonial relationships. Nation-state colonial jurisprudence enshrined these relationships of dominance and coercion. Colonial archival programs served often as textual armouries prioritizing evidence of colonial settlement and creating categories of identity and knowledge to privilege and preserve settler narratives and leave Indigenous heritage on the unacknowledged frontiers of public memory. Across the global colonial encounter, dispossession occurred in the public archive as it occurred on the land.

Indigenous peoples represent over 5,000 languages and cultures among over 70 states. These communities have nurtured their distinct cultural, spiritual and social identities within their traditional knowledge models without and outside of the model of public archives. Many Indigenous societies continue to exist as distinct social groups and nations within colonial states. Their relationships to settler authorities remain unreconciled. Indigenous peoples – their philosophies and knowledge models – have prevailed despite enveloping colonial programs of assimilation and genocide.

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<sup>1</sup> International Council on Archives/ Conseil International des Archives, "Universal Declaration on Archives", 10 November 2011. Available at <https://www.ica.org/en/universal-declaration-archives>.



International organizations have begun to acknowledge Indigenous peoples' unique rights as part of the collective community of humanity. International forums increasingly defend cultural diversity for the survival of humankind. UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity argues, "[cultural diversity] is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples."<sup>2</sup>

Indigenous peoples for centuries have struggled to determine their own life paths. Twenty-five years of Indigenous diplomacy have convinced UN member states to formally recognize the inherent and unique rights of Indigenous peoples. The *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) is a framework for the resurgence of Indigenous peoples, free to self-determine their destinies independent of external authority. The UNDRIP is also a response to widespread human rights violations that disabled Indigenous societies for generations. A rebalanced, decolonized archival heritage recognizes that a more democratic social memory of colonization is a difficult but necessary step in the ethical progress of humanity. "A people's knowledge of the history of its oppression is part of its heritage and ... must be preserved by appropriate measures in fulfilment of the State's duty to remember. Such measures shall be aimed at preserving the collective memory from extinction and, in particular, at guarding against the development of revisionist and negationist arguments."<sup>3</sup>

International law now recognizes a baseline standard of unique collective rights "for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world."<sup>4</sup> These documents also recognize the right to culturally mediated memory keeping and the right to control self-representation in public cultural heritage institutions and other platforms of public representation. The ICA must substantiate these international principles for dealing with the colonial past in a manner designed to "establish fundamental trust and accountability in society."<sup>5</sup> Our duty to acknowledge our colonial history is the prerequisite to building a collective humanity on the foundations of justice, dignity and respect. It is a recognition that we are what we choose to remember, but we are also what we choose to forget.

## THEMES AND COMMITMENTS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

The ICA recognizes its responsibility to re-imagine the meaning of archives as an engaging model of social memory; to embrace Indigenous worldviews and methods of creating, sharing and preserving valued knowledge. To decolonize our archival principles with Indigenous knowledge methods, to open the meaning of public archives to Indigenous interpretations, is to bring new dynamics of spirituality, ecology and Indigenous philosophy into the European traditions of archival memory. It will also support a fair and healing remembrance of the colonial encounter. The ICA supports the remodelling of traditional archival principles. To challenge colonial ideologies in the archival setting is an endeavour of generations, like the colonial program itself. The result will be a new model of public archives as an ethical space of encounter, respect, negotiation and collaboration without the dominance or judgement of distant and enveloping authority.

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<sup>2</sup> Article 4 *UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity*, 2001. See, Erica-Irene A. Daes, "Working Paper by the Chairperson-Rapporteur on the Concept of Indigenous People," UN Doc. E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1996/2 (10 June 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Joinet, "The Administration of Justice and the Human Rights of Detainees: Question of the impunity of perpetrators of human rights violations (civil and political)," Commission on Human Rights: Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, United Nations Economic and Social Council, 49th session, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1997/20/Rev.1, 2 October 1997, p.5.

<sup>4</sup> *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, 2007, Doc. A/61/L.67.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Sisson, "A Conceptual Framework for Dealing with the Past." *Politorbis* No. 50-3/2010.

Specifically this means:

**1. KNOWLEDGE AUTHORITIES:** Acknowledging there are Indigenous cognitive frameworks to understand ideas of history, memory, heritage and cultural identity. These co-exist, often unacknowledged, with the institutional knowledge authorities embedded in colonial institutions of heritage and culture. Public archives in colonial jurisdictions must inform their archival practices with a perspective of reciprocal respect, a respectful engagement across imperial and Indigenous worldviews. The respectful braiding of these knowledge authorities begins the work to decolonize state-sanctioned, institutional houses of memory.

- 1 (a) This Declaration promotes a respectful ethical relationship between archival institutions and Indigenous communities to recognize the diversity of social meanings embodied in archival materials and the knowledge models that interpret them;
- 1 (b) This Declaration recognizes that the successful cultural engagement of public archival representatives and Indigenous communities occurs within a safe and ethical environment of respectful encounter where diverse cultural heritage authorities may freely express and negotiate the values and assumptions that will guide an understanding of the past embodied in materials of memory; ceremony, cultural tradition and social protocol must inform this social engagement of knowledge keepers;
- 1 (c) This Declaration recognizes traditional Indigenous knowledge models are built on ideas of space, community, spirituality and ecology; they are best understood through affiliated community representation.

**2. PROPERTY AND OWNERSHIP:** Understanding that there is a need for state-sanctioned archival institutions to recognize Indigenous ownership of Indigenous traditional knowledge, cultural expression, knowledge and intellectual property.

- 2(a) This Declaration recognizes Indigenous cultures and philosophies are embodied and lived through oral tradition, artwork and other forms of collective expression; the continuity, growth and revival of Indigenous communities is dependent on Indigenous control and ownership of these cultural expressions of identity;
- 2(b) This Declaration recognizes the process of defending intangible cultural heritage must be placed in the stewardship of the elders, knowledge keepers and Indigenous representatives from the communities where the “practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and skills”<sup>6</sup> originated, not the nation states responsible for the assimilation and erasure of their cultures; this recognition includes the replevin of archival materials when requested by the originating community;
- 2(c) This Declaration recognizes state-oriented intellectual property rights are built on enlightenment values of individual ownership; they are an inappropriate legal structure to defend Indigenous collective rights to traditional cultural expression and Indigenous knowledge.

**3. RECOGNITION AND IDENTITY:** Understanding that the 500-year history of the colonial encounter has been an Indigenous struggle for recognition. The common representation of Indigenous peoples in colonial archival institutions is a product of forced assimilation and cognitive erasure of Indigenous culture and identity. Indigenous peoples have the right to be recognized in archival representational systems (e.g., in the arrangement and description of archives) as holding unique kinship, identity and cultures as distinct peoples.

- 3(a) This Declaration recognizes that Indigenous languages of place, social and spiritual value must become valued component vocabularies and ontologies of colonial records description;
- 3(b) This Declaration recognizes that Indigenous social authority must participate as collaborators and co-authors in the description of records in the custody of public archival institutions whenever those records directly concern the identity of a particular Indigenous community;

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<sup>6</sup> UNESCO Declaration on Intangible Cultural Heritage, Paris: UNESCO, 2007.



- 3(c) This Declaration recognizes records description must attend to the dynamic and constantly changing relationships across creators, contexts and carriers of information; the history of colonial archives reveals that evidence is not a static fact but a matrix of diverse living relationships, and like all relationships they are open to trust and mistrust, good faith and manipulation; a decolonized archival memory recognizes the social provenance of colonial records must be expressed in ongoing collaborative and participatory descriptive representation of archival material;
- 3(d) This Declaration recognizes the need to acknowledge the politics of knowledge production – race, gender, class, governance – will inevitably influence the records created and purposefully preserved for future reference and this must be acknowledged in description.

**4. RESEARCH AND ACCESS:** Recognizing research and access to archival records is a socially mediated process and a conceptual site of conflict between European and Indigenous ways of knowing.

- 4(a) This Declaration recognizes colonial states have created, in academia and government, a tremendous volume of records concerning Indigenous peoples. These records have been disseminated and stored without the input of the affiliated Indigenous community. There is a need for affiliated Indigenous peoples to gain a degree of control over the access to information created by state-directed governance and cultural authorities;
- 4(b) This Declaration recognizes the nature and quality of state-generated information concerning Indigenous peoples have enormous influence over knowledge-based decision-making, effective policy and programs, and public perception of Indigenous communities. This Declaration advocates for changes to nation-state recordkeeping legislation and practice to incorporate concerns for Indigenous data sovereignty, right of reply and redress;
- 4(c) This Declaration recognizes access to records containing traditional Indigenous cultural expression, sacred belief, social and legal knowledge must recognize and apply the social, legal and cultural protocols of the affiliated communities. This should be done in consultation with the affiliated community.

**5. SELF-DETERMINATION:** As noted in the UNDRIP, “Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development”;<sup>7</sup>

- 5(a) This Declaration recognizes Indigenous peoples have a right to live as Indigenous peoples. This right derives from the historical proof of their political, spiritual and social structures; traditions, collective histories and philosophies;
- 5(b) This Declaration recognizes that the acquisition programs of public archives form the memory component of a greater colonial equation; colonial public archives are over-informed with the settlers’ perspective, creating “imperial archives” at the cost of a more complete colonial narrative informed by Indigenous historical experiences and perspectives;
- 5(c) This Declaration recognizes colonial archival records have been used to pathologize the colonized; the public depiction of a community in public archival institutions can create real harms and inflict damage on the affiliated community; archives can provide the resources to acknowledge human rights violations against Indigenous peoples and construct new trusted relationships between state colonial jurisdictions and Indigenous communities;
- 5(d) This Declaration recognizes to safeguard and share the memories of Indigenous heritage, to promote its survival and resurgence, is a human right.
- 5(e) This Declaration recognizes those UNDRIP articles of direct archival relationship to cultural self-determination.

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<sup>7</sup> UNDRIP, article 3.