

PRESS RELEASE - 27 April 2020

Leading library, archives, and museum organizations call on WIPO to help safeguard cultural heritage

April 26 is World Intellectual Property Day, established by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) to publicize how copyright, patents, trademarks, and designs affect the world. Their focus this year, 2020, is on innovating towards a “green future.” This is a welcome goal, but we must not forget the threat to the world's cultural heritage posed by the disastrous effects of climate change, and aggravated by the lack of appropriate copyright legislation supporting the institutions that preserve our common knowledge and heritage.

That is why the world's leading library, archives, and museums organizations are calling on WIPO and its Member States to respond to the need for international copyright laws that will empower these cultural institutions to prevent further loss of worldwide cultural heritage due to rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and other disasters linked to global warming.

“As the effects of climate change become more common, our heritage will continue to suffer irretrievable losses,” said Winston Tabb, head of the libraries delegation. “Tragically, this is already happening in many countries. These threats to our collective memory can be addressed by making preservation copies; but the global patchwork of inconsistent, inexistent and inadequate copyright laws stands in the way.”

At regional seminars and an international conference organized by WIPO in 2019, a consensus emerged that copyright exceptions play a key role in enabling heritage institutions to make preservation copies of works in libraries, archives, and museums. WIPO Member States have the power to support international action in favor of preservation copying, thus providing heritage institutions with the legal certainty needed to safeguard our heritage.

The attached Open Letter [in [English](#), [French](#), and [Spanish](#)] is intended to raise awareness of the need for copyright laws that support, rather than hinder, efforts to preserve the world's heritage. It calls on WIPO and its Member States to take national and international action, without which heritage institutions will be unable to prevent the irretrievable loss of many of the world's cultural treasures. A way forward must be found to enable the world's heritage institutions to make and preserve copies of works using all available tools without fear of copyright barriers.

The five organizations behind this effort— International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Council on Archives (ICA), the International Council on Museums (ICOM), Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL), and the Society of American Archivists (SAA)—invite all heritage organizations around the world and other organisations that share our goals to sign this open letter to share it on social media and other communications channels, and to call on their national authorities to support its messages in their engagement at WIPO.

Even as the world responds to immediate crises such as COVID-19, we cannot forget the long-term global threat of climate change. We must act now to safeguard our heritage.

List of signatories: [here](#)

To sign the open letter: [here](#)

