

Україна м. Київ 01001 Ukraine  
Вул. Грушевського, 6  
(Національний художній музей України)  
тел./факс: + 38 044 2798570  
[www.icom.in.ua](http://www.icom.in.ua) e-mail: [secretariat@icom.in.ua](mailto:secretariat@icom.in.ua)

Ukraine, Kyiv, 01001  
6 Hrushevskoho str.  
(National Art Museum of Ukraine)  
tel ./ fax: + 38 044 2798570  
[www.icom.in.ua](http://www.icom.in.ua) e-mail: [secretariat@icom.in.ua](mailto:secretariat@icom.in.ua)

Ref. № 15 16.08.2022

**Mr. Alberto Garlandini**  
President of the ICOM

**Ms. Kathrin Pabst**  
Chair of the International Committee on Ethical Dilemmas

**Mr. Peter Keller**  
Director General

**Dear President and esteemed members  
of the International Committee On Ethical Dilemmas,  
dear ICOM members!**

ICOM is an international organization that unites more than 40 thousand members from 141 countries. Its members espouse the goal of promoting and supporting museums around the world, embracing professional principles and preserving world heritage through museums that work for the benefit of humankind. ICOM members are united both by their goals and by the values that serve as the roadmap for our shared movement. The party that violates these agreements discredits not just itself but also the entire international community by making it complicit in these violations. Russia is deliberately destroying and robbing Ukrainian museums and moving their collections to Russian territory while Russian ICOM members participate in Russia's manipulative projects that run against the founding principles of the international ICOM. Should we assume responsibility and become complicit in such actions? Unfortunately, the rules developed and adopted by all ICOM members no longer work. Silently watching the aggressor's actions or merely expressing concern does not help; moreover, that gives the green light to those who might be tempted to violate the rules in the future. Therefore, we request that Russia's membership in ICOM was terminated.

On February 24, 2022, Russia committed yet another blatant act of aggression against Ukraine. Its missile shelling and air bombardment has been imperiling the lives of Ukrainian civilians, including children, across every region of

the country for 6 months now. No object of infrastructure, historic landmark or cultural institution across the entire country is safe.

The list compiled by the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine already features more than 450 cultural landmarks destroyed or damaged by the Russian army, including 34 damaged or destroyed museums and memorial complexes.

For example, the Russian army has destroyed the Library of the St. Petro Mohyla Church and St. George's Church in the village of Zavorychi (1873), the Ascension Church in the village of Lukianivka, Kyiv Region (1879), Kuindzhi Museum of Fine Arts in Mariupol, the Ivankiv Museum of Local History with its collection of Maria Pryimachenko's works, Vasyl Tarnovsky Museum of Ukrainian Antiquities and its library in Chernihiv, and the Hryhorii Skovoroda Memorial Museum in the village of Skovorodynivka, Kharkiv Region. This list is far from complete.

The Russian leadership has let its army destroy Ukrainian objects of cultural heritage and has been sending Russian museum workers to steal collections from Ukrainian museums, moving them either to Russia or to the temporarily occupied parts of Ukraine that had been under Russian military control since 2014 (Donetsk, Luhansk, the Crimean Peninsula). Such actions provide ample reasons to believe that the Russian Federation has been violating international humanitarian law. Additionally, looting, illegal archeological digs, changing the ownership of cultural objects and redrawing the borders of designated protected areas without Ukraine's agreement violates the principles of international laws on the protection of cultural heritage.

Despite the abundance of evidence to the contrary, including the facts documented by the UNESCO, the Russian Federation cynically denies that the Russian army has been destroying civilian objects in Ukraine.

Russia's ICOM chose the same policy of omission and denial.

Russian museum workers, members of the national and international ICOM committees, take part in moving museum collections from the temporarily occupied Ukrainian territories to other regions and to Russia, and create propagandistic exhibitions both on the temporarily occupied territories and in Russia.

For example, the Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation and the Victory Museum (Moscow, institutional ICOM member), with the support of the so-called "Ministry of Culture, Sport and Youth of Luhansk People's Republic," have organized [Our Traditions](#) project. Its goal was to bring the Russian cultural and historic heritage to the residents of the temporarily occupied city of Luhansk and parts of Luhansk Region (seized in 2014) and to bring the region "back to the all-Russian family."

The project's participants included the Vladimir Dahl State Museum of the History of Russian Literature (its director is on the presidium of ICOM Russia and

ICLCM), the Victory Museum (institutional ICOM member), the Russian Museum of Ethnography (institutional ICOM member), The State Museum of History, the Russian National Museum of Music (institutional ICOM member; its representative is on the CIM CIM board).

The project's main organizer, the Victory Museum (Moscow), has hosted blatantly manipulative exhibitions, such as [The Commonplace Nazism](#) and *The Commonplace NATOism*. These exhibitions had broadcast Russian propagandistic clichés about Ukraine, repeated Soviet propaganda and espoused the violent narratives promulgated by Russian state, including those about the imaginary “Nazi doctrine” of European and North American nations. Despite the fact that these messages can be easily fact-checked and disproved, Russian citizens accept them easily and uncritically.

The Russian army and the FSB have been intimidating and terrorizing Ukrainian museum teams on the temporarily occupied territories on the large scale. Museum workers and/or their families have been subject to searches, interrogations and abductions. In the most notorious example, Leyla Ibrahimova, the director of Melitopol Museum of Local History, was abducted from her home at 6AM on [March 10](#). Leyla Ibrahimova was only released after the case drew international attention.

Museum workers and their families who remain on the temporarily occupied territories experience pressure from the occupying administrations, facing the real risk of abductions, interrogations, torture and executions.

These facts were already widely known on June 22, 2022, when Mikhail Piotrovsky, the director of the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg and a known authority in the Russian museum world, gave his interview to the Russian official news outlet “Rossiyskaya Gazeta.” He condemned the killing of civilians but noted, “My opinion on the military actions is not that straightforward either. On the one hand, wars bring blood and murder, but on the other, this is how people, this is how nations affirm themselves”, “We are all militarists and imperialists.”

Supporting the occupation of Crimea and describing Ukrainian cities as Russian, he cast doubt on the European nations' right to be a part of Europe: “I keep repeating that we have the right to be a part of Europe because we have the classical heritage in southern Russia: Chersonesus, Kerch, Taman. Those that have the classical heritage are European. Norway, for example, doesn't have that classical heritage, having never had Greek colonies or Roman legions.”

Adopting militarist rhetoric, he openly acknowledged that Russia's cultural policies were an organic continuation of its military doctrine. He framed museum projects not as a cultural exchange between civilized countries but as a cultural/military victory over France and Europe: “And our latest exhibitions abroad are just a powerful cultural offensive. A kind of ‘special operation,’ if you will, which a lot of people don't like. But we are coming. And no one can be allowed to interfere with our offensive...”

In essence, this interview demonstrates the position of the Russian museum community, which has long been integrated into the Russian state apparatus. Alexander Sholokhov, a president of ICOM Russia since 2019, is a deputy of the Russian parliament (State Duma) from the leading pro-Putin party United Russia; he supported the laws on the ratification of the Treaty on the Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Russian Federation and the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (February 22, 2022). The vice-president of ICOM Russia, Vladimir Tolstoy, is Adviser to the President of the Russian Federation on culture and arts.

Russia's current tactics regarding museums on the temporarily occupied territories are not new. Russia has employed similar practices in 2014, after its annexation of Crimea and occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Unfortunately, the international museum community has not imposed any sanctions then, and most museums in other countries didn't suspend their cooperation with Russian museums. This had sent Russia a clear signal that it could continue violating the laws with impunity. The destruction of Ukrainian cultural heritage, theft and cross-border movement of its cultural artifacts in violation of international laws and ICOM's Code of Ethics unfold with the agreement or even with direct participation of Russian ICOM members.

In light of all these facts and based on point iii of ICOM statute's *Article 4. Membership Section 4 – Termination of Membership* ("Infringement of ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums"), among other reasons, we ask that Russian museums' membership in the International Council of Museums was terminated, and recommend that ICOM members suspend their cooperation with Russian museums.

**With full respect,  
ICOM Ukraine National Committee.**