

Edinburgh International Culture Summit 2016 ends with call to save heritage endangered by war

The Edinburgh International Culture Summit took place between 24-26 August 2016 at Holyrood. Discussions centred around the 40 cultural delegations who listened to over 60 speakers from around the world talking about issues which affect every nation.



Representatives from Libya, Syria, Oman and China shared details of their efforts to save their cultural heritage, the incredible value of it to their communities in often volatile regions of the world, and the personal cost of its destruction.

In his address to the Summit Professor Dr Maamoun Abdulkarim, Director General of Antiquities and Museums in Syria talked about having to close all the museums in order to protect and preserve the nation's cultural heritage. He added, "We urge the international community to stop extremists. The time has come to take action before it is too late to protect our heritage, not just in Syria but also in Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Mali, Afghanistan and elsewhere. The international community needs to bear in mind that Syrian cultural heritage is humanity, and that the loss of any of its components is a loss for the world"

Successfully attracting delegations from over 40 countries around the world from nations as diverse as the United States and Oman, Nigeria and Sweden, the Summit brought together a huge range of perspectives which demonstrated the

intrinsic and extreme value of culture to people, countries and economies.

In the Opening Ceremony Youssou N'Dour addressed the Ministers talking on culture and economics and saying "A lot of things are impacting on the cultural actors. Because if these cultural creators are living in extreme poverty they can't create. And if they can't create anymore it's a catastrophe. We need to work for reform that allows cultural actors to live their lives. To live stably. When I was Minister of Culture [in Senegal] I wasn't there to convince people. I was there to invest in people."

Representing the Youth Programme being run for the first time as part of the Summit, Michael Govan from the Scottish Youth Parliament made a passionate address in the Chamber of day two of the Summit, saying "Young people now, more than ever, need to see an investment across the world in all countries into their future. Culture and arts is more than just a way of expressing ourselves, it's our heritage, it's our souls. And that's why we need it in today's society."

Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament, Ken Macintosh MSP said: "The past three days have demonstrated exactly why culture is so important. Culture has the power to unify, to enrich communities and to transform people's lives for the better.

"The long lasting impact of this Summit will be the cultural collaborations that have been created between countries and across nations and the personal friendships formed between individuals. These long lasting relationships will help create a greater shared understanding of the role of culture across the world and the benefit it can bring.

"Culture is so often overlooked. This Summit has proven that with political will anything is possible."

David Leventhal, Programme Director and founding teacher of

the Mark Morris Dance Group's Dance for PD® which is now active in 125 communities in 16 countries and who brought dance into the Chamber on the third morning, said: "My message is not foremost about money or funding, it is about leveraging the potential of artists who are already among us, who are already here, to deliver participatory activities that help all of us, Parkinsonians or not, maintain quality of life and physical ability well into our later years. Dancers are here. We are ready and we want to contribute."

Culture Secretary Fiona Hyslop said: "The event offered a diverse range of speakers, as well as countless thought-provoking ideas and contributions. I was very struck by the topical discussions on the irrevocable damage to World Heritage Sites. While Scotland's historic, vibrant Capital provided a fitting backdrop for three days of inspiring and engaging dialogue, it was also a poignant reminder of the importance of preserving our own cultural heritage.

"As we face the real threat of being taken out of the European Union, the coming together of so many nations, cultures, personalities, backgrounds and aspirations with the common aim to enhance, protect and celebrate our respective cultures was as inspiring as it was poignant. The lasting message, for me, from the Culture Summit 2016 is that we all have to be brave when it comes to culture: through international cooperation, culture can provide the ties that bind us all."

Fergus Linehan, Director of Edinburgh International Festival, said "Since 1947 the Edinburgh International Festival has welcomed the world to Scotland's capital city. The addition of the Edinburgh International Culture Summit to the August season has enriched our city's festivals and created a vital platform for debate and discussion on cultural policy. In addition we have seen case studies and presentations that will assist us in maximising social, cultural and economic benefits for the communities in which we operate. We are enormously proud to be a partner in this historic gathering and look

forward to putting into action the decisions and collaborative initiatives that have agreed.”

Jonathan Mills, Director of the Edinburgh International Culture Summit Foundation said: “We have experienced a truly special Summit over the last three days. The coming together of so many nations with a common passion for culture but many different stories and contexts has inspired and moved us. I know that many people leave here with new ideas, new priorities and new relationships through which we can share and collaborate into the future.”