WAC statement on the devastating fire and loss of heritage housed in the Brazilian National Museum

On behalf of the entire membership, the WAC Council wants to express our solidarity with the Brazilian people and their National Museum, who suffer from the recent devastating fire and the loss of their heritage as a result.

We are all still in shock, and we share your grief; although the investigation and the search of what can be retrieved are still under way, it seems many of the material testaments and embodiments of human lives, memories and identities housed there have been lost forever. It is not only a tragedy for the Brazilian people and indigenous peoples living in its sovereign territory but also a tragedy for entire humanity.

We also share the anger and grief expressed, particularly concerning the way the Museum had been treated over many years up to the incident. We fully understand the economic difficulty and challenges the Brazilian government and the concerned authorities have been and are faced with and had to tackle. However, without their will and determination to fulfill their duties, the irreplaceable heritage of the Brazilian people, indigenous peoples living in its sovereign territory, and indeed of entire humanity is vulnerable, and this has been proven in the most tragic way.

We believe the loss and destruction of heritage constitute an infringement of basic human rights, the protection and promotion of which the governments and political authorities of the world are obliged to strive for. Once again, we express our solidarity with the museum staff and workers, the Brazilian people and indigenous peoples living in the sovereign territory of Brazil, for their loss, and appeal to the Brazilian government and the concerned authorities to fulfill their duties and to do
their utmost to prevent a tragedy such as this from happening again by using their powers and the authority mandated to them by the peoples of Brazil.

Koji Mizoguchi

President of the World Archaeological Congress,
on behalf of the WAC Council representing the membership

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Background information
The World Archaeological Congress, with members in more than 90 countries, is the only fully international and representative organisation of practicing archaeologists. WAC’s mission is to (1) promote professional training for disadvantaged nations and communities; (2) broaden public education, involving national and international communities in archaeological research; (3) develop archaeological practice so that it empowers Indigenous and minority groups; (4) contribute to the conservation of archaeological sites threatened by looting, urban growth, tourism, development or war; and (5) re-dress global inequities amongst archaeologists.