

MEDIA RELEASE

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POLITICAL VIOLENCE THREATENS ZIMBABWE'S UNIQUE CULTURAL HERITAGE

The 6th World Archaeological Congress held in Dublin, Ireland from 29 June to 4 July 2008 noted with great concern the current political situation in Zimbabwe.

The World Archaeological Congress condemns the current politically-motivated violence in Zimbabwe. This violence has impacted negatively on the lives of Zimbabwean people and on their productive capacity.

“Violence affects everyone. It is an obstacle to development and progress, and it is causing the accelerated destruction of Zimbabwe’s cultural heritage,” said Professor Claire Smith, President of the World Archaeological Congress.

“The Congress is of the view that this heritage can only be meaningful to the present generation if used and shared in an atmosphere of peace, economic progress, and good governance,” said Professor Bayo Folorunso, of Nigeria, Vice-President of the World Archaeological Congress.

“Zimbabwe’s precious cultural heritage needs to be protected in these times of disruption and danger,” said Professor Smith. “Land is the Zimbabwean people’s most valuable resource and is essential to their sense of belonging and identity.”

The World Archaeological Congress urges a speedy solution to the current political, social, economic and humanitarian crises in the country to meet the aspiration of the Zimbabwean people.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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SUBJECT BACKGROUND:

Zimbabwe is the only country in the world named after the country’s rich archaeological heritage. Any usage of the name Zimbabwe and any representation invoking such a name, whether consciously or unconsciously, at any level, imply, and carry with it the values bestowed to the present by this rich cultural heritage. This heritage can only be meaningful to the present generations if used and shared in an atmosphere of peace, economic progress, and good governance. Zimbabweans, like everyone else in the world, have a right to identify with this heritage, without fear of condemnation or retribution. This means that those rights, be they cultural, political,

or otherwise, cannot be invoked or interpreted in a ways that justify acts leading to the denial or violation of other people's rights and fundamental freedoms.

WAC BACKGROUND:

The World Archaeological Congress (WAC) is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization and is the only elected international body of practising archaeologists. WAC holds an international congress every four years to promote the exchange of the results of archaeological research; professional training and public education for disadvantaged nations, groups and communities; the empowerment and betterment of Indigenous groups and First Nations peoples; and the conservation of archaeological sites.

The Sixth World Archaeological Congress (WAC-6) was held from 29th June—4th July at the University College Dublin. This was the first World Archaeological Congress to be held in Ireland. It was attended by over 1,800 archaeologists, native peoples and international scholars from 74 nations. Motions from the Plenary session of the Congress were considered by subsequent meetings of the World Archaeological Congress Council and Executive.

The Congress Patron for WAC-6 was President Mary McAleese. Previous Congress Patrons include Harriet Mayor Fulbright, Prince Charles and Nelson Mandela.