

MEDIA RELEASE

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TARA'S WORLD HERITAGE SIGNIFICANCE

Following the largest ever international gathering of archaeologists in Dublin, Ireland, the World Archaeological Congress has released a statement expressing its opposition to any further development alongside the new stretch of motorway in the wider landscape zone surrounding the historical site of Tara in Co Meath, Ireland.

“Tara has significance far beyond Ireland itself,” said Professor Claire Smith, President of the World Archaeological Congress. “Its iconic significance derives from its unique cultural character, as situated in a broader landscape. The World Archaeological Congress strongly encourages the Irish Government to instigate formal protection measures for this area, and to consider nominating Tara for inscription as a World Heritage site.”

“Prior to the holding of the Sixth World Archaeological Congress here in Ireland, we sent two senior representatives to look at the issue of the motorway,” said Professor Claire Smith. “They found that all the archaeological work had been done to the highest professional standards.”

The hosting of the Congress at University College Dublin facilitated the holding of a Tara stakeholders’ panel. During this forum a number of competing and often contradictory claims were made and the World Archaeological Congress has now commissioned a report on the Tara discussions.

The World Archaeological Congress stressed that its report would not interfere with the legal and consultative planning process already completed in Ireland. “We do not question the validity of the planning process undertaken in Ireland. Our purpose is to learn lessons for the future and for other countries with issues surrounding development archaeology,” said Professor Smith.

“There are many strong opinions about Tara and it is important that valid claims receive due attention, and that misinformation be sifted out. This can only be done through a considered study,” Professor Smith said.

Recognising that the reburial of ancient remains in Ireland is subject to the provisions of the National Monuments Act and the agreement of the National Museum of Ireland, the World Archaeological Congress also draws attention to the Vermillion Accord on human remains and suggests that any human remains excavated from the cultural landscape of Tara should be re-interred with due respect as close as possible to their original locations, as this is where these people would have wished to be buried.

The World Archaeological Congress notes the significant adverse impact that motorways and other forms of development can have on valuable cultural landscapes. It will consider explicit inclusion of these concerns in its Codes of Ethics.

“Throughout the world, developments such as motorways can have significant adverse impact on cultural landscapes,” said Professor Smith. “Cultural heritage needs to be factored into the planning process from the beginning.”

“In order to address these issues from a global perspective the World Archaeological Congress will be holding an Inter-Congress with the theme “Rethinking relations of Archaeology and Development.”

The Inter-Congress on archaeology and development is likely to be held in Lund, Sweden, in 2009.

FURTHER INFORMATION:

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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.