



PRESS RELEASE

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CONFERENCE SAYS PROTECTION OF HERITAGE MUST BE CENTRAL TO COPENHAGEN CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT

- Heritage trusts gather in Ireland for international conference -

Dublin, Ireland: Protecting our heritage – both natural and built – should be a core commitment arising from the UN Conference on Climate Change that will take place in Copenhagen in December.

Opening the 13th International Conference of National Trusts in Dublin today (14.09.09), Simon Molesworth, Chairman of the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO), said that conservation was a vital strategy in addressing climate change.

“Iconic buildings and landscapes all around the world are at risk because of climate change. Time is against us, and it is critical that world leaders listen and put solid measures in place at Copenhagen to protect our heritage so that it can be enjoyed by future generations,” said Mr Molesworth.

The theme for the International Conference of National Trusts is ‘Conservation in a Changing Climate’. The event is being attended by over 200 representatives from heritage trusts from around the globe, and is being hosted by An Taisce, the National Trust for Ireland.

“There are some obvious examples to demonstrate the impact of climate change: the disappearing Maldives Islands are one. While things may look near-perfect here in Ireland, a report published by the UK National Trust in 2008 predicted that the sea level around Northern Ireland will rise by up to one metre by the end of the century, threatening the Giant’s Causeway,” said Mr Molesworth.

“Strategies to conserve and protect our heritage need global leadership. At the end of our conference on Thursday, we will produce a declaration which will set out ways in which national governments from around the globe can promote heritage protection. This declaration will be communicated to the world leaders who will attend December’s Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen.

“Chief among the actions that can be taken is to run education programmes for visitors to heritage sites, so awareness of the risks and impact of climate change on these sites can be communicated. Furthermore, getting communities and individuals involved in protecting local heritage sites is an effective way of growing awareness of the importance of these sites, as well as promoting responsibility in protecting and conserving them.

“While the Copenhagen Conference is likely to be dominated by discussions on energy by the world’s most powerful nations, this should not distract from the importance of other issues, such as heritage protection, which is of interest to every individual in every community across the globe.”

Delegates attending the 13th International Conference of National Trusts signed a declaration today, entitled the ‘Dublin Declaration’, which sends a clear message to world leaders and those attending Copenhagen to prioritise heritage protection in strategies on climate change. The Declaration specifically calls on world leaders to reach agreement in Copenhagen on greenhouse gas reductions (limiting global average temperature rise to less than two degrees Celsius); to agree to promote policy frameworks at national and international levels that encourage investment in low carbon technologies; and to support measure which protect heritage sites, both in the natural and built environment.

Mr Molesworth said that national trusts share the responsibility of maintaining our global heritage for future generations: “National trusts can set the standards for sustainable property custodianship, ensuring we have a neutral carbon footprint: we can be responsible

exemplars in a world facing great change. How we respond to this new world order will vary from country to country as climate change manifests itself in differing ways around the globe.

"This conference is an opportunity for national trusts to learn from each other about enhancing their work and promotion of heritage. In the UK, the National Trust owns, operates and protects hundreds of heritage sites, and is responsible for ensuring that so many UK citizens get actively involved in their protection, including maintaining pathways on important walk-ways and keeping coastlines litter-free. Meanwhile, heritage groups from Uganda, Ethiopia and Taiwan are growing tourism around local heritage and the principles of sustainability. Here in Ireland, An Taisce has given children and teachers the tools to reduce their carbon footprint – all the while saving thousands of euro each year – through the Green Schools programme. This is a shining example of something which could be replicated in other countries."

Addressing the conference, the new Honorary President of An Taisce, Professor John Sweeney, said, "In the context of the challenges facing heritage groups around the globe, we are very fortunate, in Ireland, not to be exposed to the same threats to our natural and built heritage. Nevertheless, we cannot be complacent, and this conference will offer some important lessons that can be transported from other nations into Ireland's policy on heritage and climate change.

"For one, provision could be made in legislation to enable non-governmental groups – such as groups who protect and promote awareness of our heritage and biodiversity – to have greater capacity to become involved in the protection of our built and natural environment. Right across the globe, An Taisce's peer organisations benefit from legislation and tax reliefs to enable them to hold property and important sites in trust. This, in turn, allows for greater public participation in the maintenance of these heritage sites.

"Ireland is small and flexible. The current economic crisis offers us an opportunity to recalibrate our values and rebuild our economy and society in a more sustainable way, which protects our heritage and meets the challenges of climate change," he added. "An Taisce was chosen as the host organisation by our international colleagues in recognition of our 60th anniversary and also because other countries feel they have a lot to learn from Ireland about heritage conservation."

Delivering a keynote address at the opening of today's conference was 16-year old transition year student, Eamonn Hayes from Ballina, Co. Tipperary. He told delegates that the actions of adults were critical in determining the type of world that will be left behind for his generation. "It is obvious to me that many adults pay no attention to preserving our natural resources and the environment. It is because of this that I have agreed to share my experience and concerns with those attending the International Conference of National Trusts. I hope that those who hear my speech – including people like the Minister for the Environment and Local Government, John Gormley, and former President, Mary Robinson – can spread the message that the world is not just for this generation.

"Melting ice-caps, spreading deserts and flooding may seem like far-away problems, but if we don't take action now, they will be a reality for every citizen of this world in generations to come. Do you want your legacy to be a damaged world that you pass onto my generation, and the generation after me?"

Also addressing the opening of today's conference were: Mary Robinson, Director of Realising Rights, who delivered a paper on the impact of climate change on human rights; Richard Moe, President of the US National Trust for Historic Preservation, who delivered a paper on conserving and improving our existing built resources to combat climate change, and Dame Fiona Reynolds, Director General of the UK National Trust, who presented a paper on how the current economic climate offers challenges and opportunities for the heritage movement.

The conference was officially opened by the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government, John Gormley TD. It was funded with the support of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Getty Foundation and continues until Thursday, 17th September, when it is expected that the conference declaration will emerge.

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Contact: Catherine Heaney, DHR Communications @ + 353 1 4885808 / + 353 87-2309835

* The Getty Foundation fulfills the philanthropic mission of the Getty Trust by supporting individuals and institutions committed to advancing the understanding and preservation of the visual arts locally and throughout the world. Through strategic grants and programmes, the Foundation strengthens art history as a global discipline, promotes the interdisciplinary practice of conservation, increases access to museum and archival collections, and develops current and future leaders in the visual arts. The Foundation carries out its work in collaboration with the Getty Museum, Research Institute, and Conservation Institute to ensure that the Getty programmes achieve maximum impact.