

**Opening Remarks for Global Consortium for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage
October 21, 2019
Ring Auditorium, Washington DC**

Good morning. My name is Susan Gibbons, the Vice Provost for Collections and Scholarly Communications at Yale University, and it is a great pleasure to be with you this morning and to welcome you here. I want to first thank the Smithsonian Institution, and particularly the Hirshhorn Museum, for hosting us over the next two days—the National Mall, with its abundance of museums and collections, is a most fitting location for this convening on cultural heritage. A special thank you, too, to Michael Mason and Gus Casely-Hayford from the Smithsonian and to Don Filer from Yale, as well as to the Global Consortium’s advisory committee, for so expertly crafting our agenda.

The Global Consortium for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage is an outgrowth of the 2016 United Nations Global Colloquium of University Presidents, a meeting held at Yale that resulted in a set of recommendations around the ways in which universities and other research institutions, such as the Smithsonian, can make major contributions to the preservation of cultural heritage around the world. Importantly, the recommendations acknowledge the urgency of safeguarding global treasures and emphasize the importance in collaboration—that far more can be done in terms of education, research, and advocacy through partnerships and networks than can be done in isolation.

It was in this spirit of collaboration that the Global Consortium was born and has worked for the past three years to connect organizations big and small to leverage our shared expertise for global impact. Importantly, the Global Consortium recognizes that collaboration isn’t just important between big universities and research institutions—some of the most impactful partnerships are between small, nimble organizations, as is evident as we look around the room and see the range of organizations and areas of expertise represented here.

The sustainability of cultural heritage is one of the grand challenges of the contemporary world. The goal of this consortium is to enable the global university, education, and research communities to make transformative contributions to the preservation of cultural heritage, through broad educational programs, major collaborative research initiatives, and effective advocacy and engagement.

Our agenda for the next few days is ambitious, raising big questions about equity in the cultural heritage sector. In this room are professionals from across the field of Cultural Heritage—curators, educators, librarians, conservators, archivists, to name just a few. We have a tremendous opportunity in being here to learn from one another and to gain new understandings about how we individually and collectively can contribute to the democratization of cultural heritage globally. I want to also encourage you to think about those who are not currently in this room but should be. I am not only referring to institutions that we should encourage to join this Global Consortium. I want us to also think about individuals, from within our own institutions, whose expertise will be vital to our work. Sustainability of cultural heritage requires a multi-disciplinary approach and an advantage of having so many university members in the consortium should be that we can draw upon the vast expertise across our campuses: scientists, engineers, legal and business experts, and sociologists. Moreover, we should tap the enthusiasm of our students, as well as their impatience, as they challenge us all to do more and to act more quickly.

I hope that each of us comes away with something new—a shifted perspective, a new connection, a possible project, or a new sense of urgency—that can move our discussions into practice.

Thank you again for being here and for participating in this important work.