

Media Release

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Title: Australian Academic Elected First Woman President of World Archaeological Congress

An Australian academic was voted the first woman President of the prestigious World Archaeological Congress. Dr Claire Smith, a senior lecturer in Archaeology at Flinders University in South Australia, was elected to this position at the 5th World Archaeological Congress which was held this week in Washington, DC. She is also the youngest person to hold this position.

The Congress was attended by 1,200 archaeologists, Indigenous people, artists and academics from some 65 countries. Over seventy Australians attended the Congress, including fifteen Aboriginal people.

Dr Smith stated that "This is an exciting time to be in such a position. Archaeology is an integral part of all societies. One of the main aims of the World Archaeology Congress is to promote Indigenous control over Indigenous cultural heritage. I am proud that one of our first resolutions called for the return of bones of the 9,600 year old Kennewick man to the local Native American tribes. This Congress is the first time scientists have banded together to support these Indigenous people on the issue of respectful treatment of the mortal remains of their dead."

The war in Iraq was also a major focus of the Congress. "We were all shocked to find out that looting is still occurring in the countryside as the coalition forces have failed to secure sites that had previously been secured by archaeological teams." Dr Smith stated. "While there has been considerable publicity about the looting of the Iraq National Museum in Bagdad we are very concerned about the looting going on at archaeological sites that are thousands of years old in the southern part of Iraq. Regrettably, the damage to artefacts in Iraqi museums was both predicted by archeologists and preventable. Once again, a wanton destruction of a irreplaceable treasures is taking place. The coalition forces have a moral responsibility to provide adequate protection for these archaeological sites."

The Congress called upon the United States as the caretaker Government in Iraq to secure the sites by providing satellite surveillance and site inspections, and to assist international organisations and law enforcement agencies to curtail illegal trafficking in stolen artefacts.

Background

WAC is the only worldwide representative organisations in archaeology, and 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 WAC-5 Congress was held from June 21-June 26 at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, with the Council and Executive meetings held June 26-27. WAC-5 was the first full World Archaeological Congress to be held in North America. It was attended by over 1,200 archaeologists, native peoples and international scholars from some 65 nations.

The Congress Patron for WAC-5 was Harriet Mayor Fulbright. Patrons of previous WAC Congresses include Nelson Mandela and Prince Charles. WAC-5 was held in partnership with the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian, and in collaboration with the Getty Conservation Institute.

Further information:

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