

## International Coalition of Sites of Conscience Names Elizabeth Silkes as New Executive Director

New York, USA, August 6, 2010 — The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience has named Elizabeth Silkes as its new Executive Director, effective immediately. Elizabeth (Liz) Silkes comes to the Coalition with more than 15 years of experience in all aspects of non-profit leadership and development. Her expertise centers on strategically growing dynamic international organizations focused on mobilizing public interest in and action for social change. Ms. Silkes succeeds founding director Liz Sevcenko as the Coalition completes ten years as the only network of places of memory committed to using their history to open public dialogue on pressing contemporary issues.

“We are delighted to welcome Liz Silkes as the Coalition’s Executive Director,” said Yasmin Sooka, vice-chair of the Coalition’s Board of Trustees and co-chair of its Search Committee. “We sought a candidate whose experience demonstrates the ability to collaborate with organizations in different parts of the world; a background in both culture and human rights; and a track record running and growing non-profit organizations of similar size and structure to the Coalition’s. Liz’s experience and skills make her the right leader for the Coalition at this stage in its development.”

W. Richard West Jr, founding director and director emeritus of the National Museum of the American Indian, and a member of the Board of the Coalition, said “The American Association of Museum’s recent award for the pioneering work of Sites of Conscience in redefining civic engagement at museums around the world sets the stage for the Coalition to have further impact in the museum field. In a world shaped by media and technology, Liz Silkes’ experience in employing film to reach, engage and sustain public interest will be a tremendous asset to Sites of Conscience from Kansas to Kenya.”

“Personal stories have the power to transform a human rights concept into a tangible and universally resonant experience. Through the stories of Cape Town’s District Six Museum, for example, displacement becomes the loss of a home, a community and hope for the future – and then the inspiring effort to re-build and shape a different future. In Chile, Villa Grimaldi Peace Park’s stories of human resilience amid torture tell the larger tale of dictatorship and survival. Such stories provide the impetus to stimulate and sustain public involvement in campaigns for justice -- they have been the cornerstone of my career in using popular culture to propel social change,” said Ms. Silkes. “Now I am honored to be working with a visionary Board, the founding Sites of Conscience and our nearly 250 members in 45 countries to expand the visibility and impact of historic sites as key arenas for engaging people in building rights-based democracies.”

Ms. Silkes’ background in culture and human rights is matched by her track record in fundraising and organizational development: as Executive Director of FilmAid International, a humanitarian relief organization using film and video to address the needs of refugees and other displaced communities, she helped develop the \$400,000 project into a \$2 million organization in three years. FilmAid’s programs in East Africa and beyond provided communities with the tools they needed to address the issues they identified as most urgent, such as repatriation preparation, gender-based violence, peace building and HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention. Ms. Silkes was also CEO of Cinereach, a foundation supporting film and media projects focused on social change around the world. Previously, she served as Director of Major Gifts for Amnesty International USA raising more than \$5 million annually.

“Sites of Conscience represent critical bulwarks against human rights abuse. I am proud that the Open Society Institute has supported the Coalition’s ground-breaking work from its earliest beginnings, as it has grown from a \$100,000 project into a \$1.5 million internationally thriving organization,” said Aryeh Neier, President, Open Society Institute. “With the foundation the Coalition has built to date, it is in a strong position to support new communities around the world to confront the most difficult aspects of their past.”



From its founding by nine Sites in 1999, the Coalition has grown to almost 250 members in 45 countries and a communications network of close to 3,000. Since 2006, the Coalition has launched seven regional or thematic collaborations of members using parallel histories to address common current issues, such as the [Russian Sites of Conscience](#) network, committed to building an anti-totalitarian culture. Alongside these collaborative projects, individual members from 17 countries have developed nearly 50 innovative public dialogue programs in the last three years: For example, in Liberia, survivors from the country's civil war used dialogue and "body mapping" to create the first public record of the war; in Argentina and Bangladesh, members' programs invite youth to learn from the past to envision new futures. This year, the Coalition is launching [Navigating Difference](#), its first multi-site installation that will stimulate public dialogue between people in Europe and the United States on migration. [www.sitesofconscience.org](http://www.sitesofconscience.org)