



International Coalition of SITES of CONSCIENCE

From past to present,

memory to action

What Is a Site of Conscience?

A Site of Conscience is a place of memory – a museum, historic site, memorial or memory initiative – that confronts both the history of what happened there and its contemporary legacies.

Whether remembering an era centuries or decades ago, Sites of Conscience begin by facing all aspects of our history: stories of great cruelty, great courage or everyday life. Then they go a step further, activating the historical perspective with dynamic public dialogue on related issues we face today and what we can do about them.

Sites of Conscience are places that:

- Interpret history through site;
- Engage the public in programs that stimulate dialogue on pressing social issues;
- Share opportunities for public involvement and positive action on the issues raised at the site;
- Promote justice and universal cultures of human rights.

What Is the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience?

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is the only worldwide network dedicated to transforming places that preserve the past into spaces that promote civic action.

The Coalition recognizes that the power of sites of memory is not inherent; it must be harnessed as a deliberate tactic in the service of human rights and citizen engagement. **This conscious effort to connect past to present and memory to action is the hallmark of the Sites of Conscience movement.** As a network of more than 300 Sites of Conscience in 65 countries, we engage tens of millions of people every year in using the lessons of history to take action on challenges to democracy and human rights today. Through powerful participatory programs that bring people together across difference, we advocate for every community's right to preserve places where struggles for human rights and democracy have occurred, to talk openly about what happened there, and to harness the strengths of memory, heritage, arts and culture to build ethical societies that envision and shape a more just and humane future.

What Does the Coalition Do?

The Coalition believes that by transforming places of memory into places of civic action, we can help build lasting cultures of peace and universal human rights.

We support Sites of Conscience in creating bold, original and effective programs that connect the history of their communities with critical social and human rights issues in their region today. And by linking these efforts across the world, we are advancing the global movement so "Never Again" can be realized. We do this through:

- Member grants that support the creation or refinement of innovative and scalable Sites of Conscience programs.
- Technical support, such as providing Sites of Conscience program models for creating dialogue across difference.
- Advocacy in support of memory initiatives in peace-building and transitional justice efforts.
- Connecting members around the world to one another through new technologies and networks of Sites of Conscience so they may collaborate, share best practices and advocate for common goals.



Maison des Esclaves, Senegal



Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, Cambodia



Villa Grimaldi Peace Park, Chile



Eastern State Penitentiary, USA
Photo credit: Jeff Fusco



PUBLIC PROGRAMS AT THE COALITION

Sites of Conscience create innovative public programs that bring people together across difference to talk openly about what happened then and decide what they can do now.

At Sites of Conscience, visitors learn what happened there: the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., detention under Latin American dictatorships, life in a Russian Gulag, transiting to death camps during the Holocaust and many other histories. Using dialogue, art, film, education and other participatory approaches, visitors are then invited to act on contemporary local and global issues from reproductive rights and state repression to xenophobia. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience supports each of its 275+ members – and often brings them together – to develop these public programs. We provide funding, technical expertise and methodological resources that help Sites of Conscience create bold, original and effective programs around the world. Below is a selection of recent and ongoing projects.

ART, MEMORY AND JUSTICE

“Creating Channels of Trust: Community Truth-Telling in Outlying Regions in Colombia” Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR)

The conflict in Colombia claimed the lives of over 200,000 people between 1958-2013. To help those affected, and begin to bridge historic divides in the country, the Coalition’s Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) is advising the Colombian Truth Commission on the best tools for collecting, documenting and sharing the stories of the conflict’s survivors – an integral step to ensuring lasting peace in the country. As part of this effort, the Coalition supported seven truth-telling projects in 2018 in rural Colombia. Among those served were families of the disappeared, indigenous communities, women and African-Colombians. Participants developed an interactive art project, a documentary, a public mural, two community museums, and two traveling exhibitions, including one of mochila “testimony” bags crafted by women survivors in the Wayúu territory.



PROJECT INCUBATION

“Voices from the Vault” Diversity Challenges, NORTHERN IRELAND

Commonly known as “The Troubles,” the 30-year conflict in Northern Ireland – over whether the country should remain part of the primarily Protestant United Kingdom or join the mostly Catholic Republic of Ireland – has left over 3500 dead since 1968. While a peace accord was signed in 1998, the country remains in many ways a divided society, with more so-called “peace walls” – border barriers in Northern Ireland separating Catholic and Protestant communities – now than before the accord. Coalition member Diversity Challenges confronts this divide through storytelling and oral history projects. In 2016, they received a Project Support Fund grant from the Coalition to fund “Voices from the Vault,” a project that collects stories from former police officers in two police forces on either side of the conflict. The work is groundbreaking in that it is uncommon for state agents, who fear they will not be afforded a fair hearing, to talk about their experiences. As part of the project, Diversity Challenges produced a toolkit that is available on the Coalition’s Resource Center.

“Sometimes one sees it as something that has already happened, that is far away as history and that’s it. But being there one sees that there are people still involved because their children are still missing and they seek the remains of them ... it makes me reflect more and put myself in the place of those families.”

– Student who visited Villa Grimaldi Peace Park, a site of detention under the Pinochet regime, now a Site of Conscience in Chile

WOMEN OF CONSCIENCE

“Promoting Historical Dialogue About Sexual and Gender Based Violence During the Khmer Rouge Regime at a Local Historical Site in Siem Reap Province”

Kdei Karuna, CAMBODIA

Women’s leadership and peaceful societies are inextricably linked: One cannot exist without the other. While this fact is well documented, women around the world continue to be excluded from the very conversations they must be leading if peace, respect and dignity are to take root following conflict or abuse. To counter this trend, the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience prioritizes programs that amplify women’s voices, support women’s projects, and bolster women’s capacity to lead through local, national and international platforms. A recent example includes a Project Support Fund grant given to Cambodian member Kdei Karuna to collect and share oral histories of the victims of forced marriages under the Khmer Rouge. The histories led to the development of a play performed at a former site of detention, now a memorial.



EQUIPPING NEW GENERATIONS OF ACTIVISTS

“Brown v. Board to Ferguson: Fostering Dialogue on Youth, Incarceration and Civil Rights”

Over sixty years after Brown v. Board of Education, which ended legal segregation in US public schools, education equity remains elusive, with minority students facing striking disadvantages such as being suspended and expelled at higher rates than white students. Some are even arrested on school grounds, referred to the juvenile justice system, and sent to correctional institutions – a trend so common it is known as the “school to prison pipeline.” From 2015-2018, the Coalition supported *From Brown v. Board to Ferguson: Fostering Dialogue on Education, Incarceration and Civil Rights*, a program that brought together 11 members and their community partners from across the US to create dynamic public programs focused on youth with the goal of fostering community dialogue on race, education equity and incarceration in the context of civil rights history. Additionally, the project trained and worked with young people to assist them in establishing their own civic engagement programs at local museums, equipping them with current organizing strategies so that they could engage their communities after the program’s end.

This project was made possible in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services [MG-20-15-0072-15].

TRUTH AND JUSTICE

“Truth, Justice and Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: Coming to Terms with the Past”

Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation

Nearly 40,000 Tamil civilians were disappeared or killed and another 300,000 were internally displaced during Sri Lanka’s civil war (1983-2009). This project addresses the reconciliation and accountability needs of the country, with a particular focus on missing persons, through local and high-level consultations, capacity building workshops and funding to provide targeted technical assistance to civil society organizations (CSOs) in transitional justice policy and practice. Through its Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR), the Coalition and GIJTR partners work closely with CSOs to facilitate communication between local communities and the government of Sri Lanka as it continues its transitional justice process. In supporting a locally-led and sustainable approach to transitional justice in Sri Lanka, partners undertake activities to complement and support government transitional justice activities. The project represents the Coalition’s unique approach to transitional justice work, focusing on the experiences of marginalized individuals – victims, survivors, families of the missing, women and youth – who often find themselves stigmatized and excluded from formal channels to engage in rebuilding and reconciliation efforts, but all of whom are essential to ensuring lasting peace.



Photo credit: Sharni Jayawardena, Herstories Project, www.herstoryarchive.org

For more information on how to get involved, please contact coalition@sitesofconscience.org.



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