

Terminology to characterize the conservation of tangible cultural heritage

Voted at 22nd General Conference ICOM Shanghai 2010

Conservation - all measures and actions aimed at safeguarding tangible cultural heritage while ensuring its accessibility to present and future generations. Conservation embraces preventive conservation, remedial conservation and restoration. All measures and actions should respect the significance and the physical properties of the cultural heritage item.

- **Preventive conservation** - all measures and actions aimed at avoiding and minimizing future deterioration or loss. They are carried out within the context or on the surroundings of an item, but more often a group of items, whatever their age and condition. These measures and actions are indirect – they do not interfere with the materials and structures of the items. They do not modify their appearance.

Examples of preventive conservation are appropriate measures and actions for registration, storage, handling, packing and transportation, security, environmental management (light, humidity, pollution and pest control), emergency planning, education of staff, public awareness, legal compliance.

- **Remedial conservation** - all actions directly applied to an item or a group of items aimed at arresting current damaging processes or reinforcing their structure. These actions are only carried out when the items are in such a fragile condition or deteriorating at such a rate, that they could be lost in a relatively short time. These actions sometimes modify the appearance of the items.

Examples of remedial conservation are disinfection of textiles, desalination of ceramics, de-acidification of paper, dehydration of wet archaeological materials, stabilization of corroded metals, consolidation of mural paintings, removing weeds from mosaics.

- **Restoration** – all actions directly applied to a single and stable item aimed at facilitating its appreciation, understanding and use. These actions are only carried out when the item has lost part of its significance or function through past alteration or deterioration. They are based on respect for the original material. Most often such actions modify the appearance of the item.

Examples of restoration are retouching a painting, reassembling a broken sculpture, reshaping a basket, filling losses on a glass vessel.

Conservation measures and actions can sometimes serve more than one aim. For instance varnish removal can be both restoration and remedial conservation. The application of protective coatings can be both restoration and preventive conservation. Reburial of mosaics can be both preventive and remedial conservation.

Conservation is complex and demands the collaboration of relevant qualified professionals. In particular, any project involving direct actions on the cultural heritage requires a conservator-restorer (ref. Definition of the profession, ICOM-CC, Copenhagen, 1984, deontological code of ICOM)