



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.



Maison des Esclaves, Senegal



Gulag Museum at Perm-36, Russia



Villa Grimaldi Peace Park, Chile

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 200 Sites of Conscience in 55 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.



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 local and global issues from reproductive rights and state repression to xenophobia. The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience supports each of its 200+ 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

“Witness – Remember – Create”

Liberia Media Center & Civic Initiative, LIBERIA
Human Rights Media Center, SOUTH AFRICA

How do survivors come to terms with the trauma of war? In a pioneering initiative designed to remember the personal and public histories of Liberia’s 14-year civil war, Liberians from different communities – war widows, amputation survivors, and those who were children during the conflict – came together to share their diverse experiences and create a visual public record of their stories. Using the “body-mapping” technique in which one tells a story through a life-size drawing of her or his body, participants reflected on their painful histories and how they see themselves now. Participants added their body maps to a survivor-curated traveling exhibit, *Breaking the Silence: A Luta Continua*, which addresses South Africa’s Apartheid government. The project was hailed by former Liberian Truth Commissioners and the media as a critical step in implementing the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s recommendation for memorialization.



PROJECT INCUBATION

“Voices from the Vault”

Diversity Challenges, NORTHERN IRELAND

Commonly known as “The Troubles,” the thirty-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 will produce a toolkit that will be 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

YOUTH PROGRAMS

“A Tale to Learn”

Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen (MUPI), EL SALVADOR

As El Salvador tackles increasing problems with gangs and youth violence, the Museo de la Palabra y la Imagen’s program, “A Tale to Learn,” uses stories from El Salvador’s civil war (1980-1992) to deter youth from violence and to reinforce the need for peace and tolerance. MUPI has trained teachers and parents to use stories to spark reflection about the war’s origins and to explore how the past might relate to the intolerance, hostility, and gang violence that Salvadorans experience today. MUPI also published a book and produced a traveling exhibit about the lives of these “children of the war.” Both use personal stories to illustrate the challenges and horrors faced by young people.

COALITION-SPONSORED PROJECTS

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

Sixty years after Brown v. Board of Education, which ended legal segregation in U.S. 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.” In October 2015, the Coalition launched *From Brown v. Board to Ferguson: Fostering Dialogue on Education, Incarceration, and Civil Rights*, a three-year program that brings together eleven members and institutes from across the U.S. 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. Each participant collaborates with local community partners to train and empower young people, ages 15-25, to establish their own civic engagement programs at museums in their communities.



TRUTH AND JUSTICE

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

Global Initiative for Truth, Justice and Reconciliation (GIJTR)

An estimated 65,000 people went missing during Sri Lanka’s civil war (1983-2009), a fact that has had devastating consequences for the families of the disappeared. This project addresses the reconciliation and accountability needs of these populations. Through its Global Initiative for Justice, Truth and Reconciliation (GIJTR) – a flagship program of the Coalition that offers holistic, community-based programs to meet the transitional justice needs of societies emerging from conflict – the Coalition and GIJTR partners engage families of the missing and war-affected survivors in Sri Lanka, documenting their testimonies with particular emphasis on communities whose stories have not to date been shared, with the goal of providing entry points for them into the government of Sri Lanka’s transitional justice mechanisms. As part of the project, the Coalition also offers technical assistance to the government in transitional justice policy and practice, undertakes high-level consultations and needs assessments, implements capacity-building workshops, and provides funding for civil society organizations to engage in current transitional justice processes.



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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