

Keynote Address
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Our concept of heritage changes to reflect what we, as a society, value most.

It is without a doubt that we live at a moment in history—amongst climate crises, pandemic, growing inequality, political polarisation and desecration of sacred sites—where long-held power dynamics, priorities, and positions are being seriously challenged and re-evaluated.

Amidst turmoil and heartache, it is nonetheless in times such as the present when what previously seemed impossible comes within reach. It is in times such as now that we can build a new shared vision of the future and work together to bring it into being. So, when I speak at this year's ICOMOS General Assembly, it will be to share with you the vision First Nations women and girls have for our future, a future where:

- Our children are born surrounded by family, wrapped in community and kinship supports. From our earliest years, we are immersed in our languages and educated in our knowledges in balance with Western learnings, and we can choose to live on, access and have control over our homelands, developing and engaging in culture-based institutions and economies.
- Our knowledges, songlines and ceremonies are recognised for their worth and importance and our Laws are upheld, respected, intergenerationally transferred and embedded within local, regional and national governance and decision-making.
- First Nations communities are united through climate justice networks which centre our sophisticated systems of knowledge and are driven by our innovative solutions.

We have always known this way of being is possible—our ancestors lived it.

If it is to re-emerge, we must put in place policies and mechanisms to revive and protect our lands, languages, cultures, knowledges and ceremonies through a national framework that above all recognises and values living heritage and supports First Nations Peoples to exercise our rights and responsibilities on Country.

Heritage is part of a bigger picture of land justice, which is, in turn, part of the bigger picture of our ways of being – of securing our rights to culture and to self-determination. Heritage systems, as part of the broader regime of land ownership and management systems, must be reformed to uphold and translate rights into real benefits.

Heritage changes, and—with the right shared vision in place—the mainstream heritage sector can play a critically important part working alongside First Nations peoples and organisations to bring a better, more inclusive and more sustainable future into being.