



## STATEMENT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL NATIONAL TRUSTS ORGANISATION FAMILY AND FRIENDS AT THE GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE ISLANDS SUMMIT

*Saint Kitts and Nevis, May 2025*

At the Global Sustainable Islands Summit, the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) family stands united in sounding the alarm: **our cultural heritage is under siege from climate change** and the time for action is now.

From the Caribbean to the Pacific, from the Indian Ocean to the North Atlantic, island communities are witnessing the devastating impacts of climate change on their cultural heritage. Rising seas are swallowing sacred sites. Violent storms are tearing through historic buildings. Shifting temperatures and humidity are degrading irreplaceable artifacts. Biodiversity loss, salt weathering and coastal erosion are not abstract threats - they are daily realities undermining the very foundations of our shared identity.

We call on governments, international institutions and climate finance mechanisms to act with urgency and resolve. Cultural heritage is not a luxury - it is a cornerstone of sustainable development, community resilience and environmental stewardship. Yet, it remains dangerously overlooked in climate policy and funding frameworks.

A recent survey of heritage managers across the INTO network reveals a stark truth: Existing public policies are woefully inadequate. Where policies do exist, they are vague, underfunded and disconnected from the lived realities of heritage professionals and local communities. The absence of clear, enforceable guidelines on climate and heritage is leaving our past - and our future - exposed.

### **Today we are calling for:**

- Comprehensive, climate-smart heritage policies that are locally grounded and globally informed
- Investment in education to embed cultural heritage in curricula and public awareness
- Support for community-based restoration and resilience projects, led by those who know their heritage best
- Funding for research, documentation and digital archiving to safeguard knowledge before it is lost
- Incentives for adaptive reuse and retrofitting of historic buildings, preserving both culture and carbon

We are proud of the work already being done restoration projects, educational outreach and the tireless efforts of heritage professionals. But pride is not enough. We need resources. We need recognition. We need results.

And we need youth. Young people are not just the inheritors of our cultural heritage - they are its most powerful advocates. Their creativity, energy and commitment to justice and sustainability must be harnessed. We call for greater investment in youth-led heritage initiatives, intergenerational learning and programmes that empower young people to become stewards of their cultural and natural environments. The future of our islands depends on them.

Cultural heritage is not just about the past - it is a guide for the future. It holds the wisdom of generations who lived in harmony with their environment. It offers solutions rooted in vernacular knowledge and traditional practices. It is a source of identity, belonging and hope.

### **Our Pledge**

As INTO members and participants of this session in Saint Kitts and Nevis, we commit to working together to:

- Sustain a global network of collaboration, ensuring our voices are heard at future international forums such as COP and the UN SIDS Conference in 2034
- Share knowledge and resources to strengthen our collective impact
- Explore joint funding opportunities that support innovative, community-led heritage and climate resilience projects
- Advance educational initiatives, integrating cultural heritage into climate education and youth engagement programmes
- Foster interdisciplinary collaboration between academia, heritage institutions, policymakers and community-based organisations to co-create solutions rooted in local knowledge and global solidarity

**We urge all governments and international bodies to place cultural heritage at the heart of climate action.** Let us not wait until the tides have washed away our stories, our songs, our sacred places. The time to invest is now.

Together, we can protect the soul of our islands - and in doing so, protect the planet.