

The Toronto Declaration

Leaders from science centres and museums around the world met in Toronto, Ontario, Canada from June 14-19, 2008 for the Fifth Science Centre World Congress. 400 delegates from 51 countries participated, continuing the dialogue from previous gatherings in Finland (1996), India (1999), Australia (2002) and Brazil (2005).

Each year, 290,000,000 citizens actively participate in the exhibitions, programs, events and outreach initiatives organized by 2,400 science centres worldwide(1). Science centres stimulate curiosity and develop enquiring minds. They change people's lives, influencing their attitudes and thinking. Research shows that science centres demystify science, conveying its beauty, showing its necessity and making it accessible to the general public. They foster positive attitudes towards science, help people to appreciate the context of scientific advances and understand how science affects their lives.

In 2008, science literacy is as important as other forms of literacy and numeracy. It is also a powerful tool for social inclusion. Science centres have relevance to all sectors of the population and have become important meeting places for science and society. They operate across geographical, economic, political, religious and cultural boundaries. They impact the well-being, education, achievement and skills of current and future generations. They are safe places for difficult conversations.

Around the world today, science centres:

- are highly-visible and trusted hubs of activity, dialogue and discourse about science and technology
- support the skills needed for effective problem-solving, creativity, innovation, critical thinking and decision-making, therefore enhancing lifelong learning of science and technology
- are important resources for the formal education system and contribute to strengthening the knowledge bases of their respective societies
- influence the motivation of students, the learning process and their career choices
- empower teachers, introducing them to more effective ways of teaching science, mathematics and technology
- create important platforms for the increasing number of virtual visitors engaging with science – and with each other – using on-line and digital technologies
- influence research and museology related to science communication, education and engagement
- present global knowledge of science and technology within the local reality
- are trusted places of inclusion and equity where the public can actively engage with critical issues which affect society
- form strategic partnerships to help address important local, national and global challenges

At the Fifth Science Centre World Congress, delegates shared expertise and developed common agendas for action. A new era of global cooperation respecting local cultures is needed if we are to successfully live on a planet with diminishing resources and significant environmental challenges. Science centres can be a powerful force for good. Children who attend our science centres are growing up in a rapidly changing world and can become critical “agents of change” so that everyone can have a better future. Teens and university students who participate in science centre programs are tomorrow’s leaders and decision makers. Adults who visit our centres and get involved re-engage with science and become better positioned to understand the context of scientific discoveries and contribute to dialogue on topics such as climate change, human health, the need for renewable energies, water shortages and HIV/AIDS.

We, the participants in the Fifth Science Centre World Congress, believe that science is an important tool for a better life on our planet.

We advocate that all citizens should have access to a science centre or its services in their own region. We will use our collective expertise and experience in helping to expand the activities of our sector to places and communities where science centres are needed and wanted but not yet established.

We commit to work together to overcome cultural, physical, social, economic and geographic barriers to engage and connect people through science.

We will actively seek out issues related to science and society where the voices of citizens should be heard and ensure that dialogue occurs.

We will work together to identify how science centres can contribute to the achievement of the United Nations Millennium Goals.

We will search for funding and mechanisms to create a better future for all through global engagement with issues of local, national and global relevance, including environmental awareness, science education and innovation.

At the Sixth Science Centre World Congress, to be held in Cape Town, South Africa in 2011, we shall assess the extent to which we have, as individual institutions and collectively, moved forward on the goals established here.

Fifth Science Centre World Congress
June 19, 2008

Toronto Declaration Endorsed By:

ASPAC – Asia Pacific Network of Science and Technology Centres

ASTC - Association of Science-Technology Centers

Chinese Association of Natural Science Museums

ECSITE – European Network of Science Centers and Museums

NSCMIN - National Council of Science Museums India

RedPop – Network for the Popularization of Science and Technology in Latin America and the Caribbean

SAASTEC – Southern Africa Association of Science and Technology Centres