

September 5, 2018

Letter Regarding the Tragic Fire at the Brazilian National Museum

The Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America (SALSA), comprised of students and scholars from throughout the world, wishes to express our profound sadness and indignation with the destruction by fire of the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro on September 2, 2018. We stand in solidarity with our colleagues whose life works have been thrown to the flames by wanton neglect and political indifference.

The collections in the Museu Nacional are irreplaceable: the ethnological collections, especially, represent the oral and material cultures of indigenous peoples throughout South America, and the loss of this archive is much more than a loss to science or to the national patrimony of Brazil. Nothing less than significant and unique portions of the story of humankind have been lost.

Governments have an exigent and continuous duty to protect social and cultural patrimony, and we are saddened and frustrated with the political and economic choices made by the authorities in Brazil, actions that set the conditions for the Museu Nacional conflagration. We stand by the provost of UFRJ and the director of the Museu Nacional, who for decades have confronted draconian budget cuts. We join our voices to those calling for a thorough and transparent investigation of the fire. Moreso, we join our hearts with those scholars, students, indigenous nations, Afro-Brazilian communities, traditional peoples, and citizens in general who have lost so much.

We hope and trust that the Brazilian government will move affirmatively to work with museum staff and to provide funds and assistance to the appropriate processes for rebuilding the country's cultural patrimony. As a community of scholars dedicated to the promotion of ethical research with and for the peoples and environments in South America, we also stand firmly committed to offering our assistance in the aftermath of this unthinkable tragedy.

On Behalf of the SALSA Membership and its Board of Directors.

