
LASA expresses its condolences in the aftermath of the fire at Brazil's Museu Nacional and calls for the protection of this patrimony of humanity

The disastrous fire at Brazil's oldest cultural institution, the Museu Nacional, and the loss of collections of incalculable scholarly and scientific value, has shocked and saddened scholars and researchers far beyond Rio de Janeiro. The Executive Council of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), an organization dedicated to the promotion of scholarly research and exchange and the translation of knowledge related to Latin America, and the Brazilian Studies Association, an international professional organization dedicated to promoting Brazilian Studies in the United States, first wish to offer their profound condolences to the Museu Nacional's researchers, curators, students, and staff, and to the Brazilian people, who are the most directly affected by this tragedy. At the same time, LASA and BRASA wish to express their grave concern that both long-term underfunding and recent severe budget cuts left an institution of national significance and international standing vulnerable to devastation that basic structural reforms could have prevented. The absence of minimal fire safety and security measures and the lack of disaster preparedness reflect a shameful disregard for the Brazilian nation's crucial cultural and scholarly resources.

Aside from mounting a major effort to salvage what remains of the museum's research collections, display exhibitions, and teaching facilities, and disseminating its findings, we call upon the current federal government, and the administration that takes office following the upcoming presidential elections, to take serious steps to protect Brazil's architectural patrimony, and its scientific and scholarly infrastructure, including the much-neglected Arquivo Nacional and the Biblioteca Nacional, the seventh largest national library in the world.

Finally, the LASA Executive Council and the BRASA Executive Committee wish to note that investment in the premier cultural institutions of the Global South, whose collections attract researchers from throughout Latin America and around the world, offers a path towards a more equitable circulation of knowledge, expertise, and cultural influence. The Museu Nacional is not only a central component of Brazil's national patrimony but also a global resource, and one that deserves robust aid and support from international agencies, foundations, and academic associations. We hope that in the aftermath of Sunday's catastrophe, interested parties both within and beyond Brazil will develop strategies to support the museum's invaluable materials, educational programs, and human resources, whose survival is of interest to scholars and researchers everywhere.

The LASA Executive Council and the BRASA Executive Committee
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