



# WORLD HERITAGE WATCH

## Strategic Document<sup>1</sup>

I.

The UNESCO World Heritage Convention ("Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage") is one of the most effective global mechanisms for the protection of natural and cultural heritage, and an overwhelming success story. It has been ratified by 191 countries and achieved near-universal validity. To this day, 1007 properties have been included in the World Heritage List.

Many of the properties now under protection would not have been preserved had they not been inscribed, monitored and supported by UNESCO and its Advisory Bodies. Often the international attention and enormous prestige associated with the World Heritage status have been critical in saving properties from the forces of destruction and ignorance.

And yet, in spite of all efforts and successes, the World Heritage is exposed to ever new threats. Economically weaker countries in particular do not have the capacity to grant the conservation of their World Heritage properties the priority which is needed in order to ensure their protection. With decreasing financial resources and mounting challenges affecting a steadily growing number of World Heritage properties, the needs for monitoring, preserving, safeguarding, supporting and protecting the properties at times exceed the capacities of States Parties, and increasingly even those of UNESCO.

Natural heritage properties are particularly affected by factors such as climate change and related extreme weather occurrences, resource extraction, poaching and development. Cultural properties and landscapes suffer from construction, modernization pressure, neglect and mismanagement, but increasingly also from warfare and willful destruction. Much less noted, but equally harmful for both natural and cultural heritage, are environmental damages caused by everyday human activities such as air pollution from traffic, heating and factories, the spreading of alien species, changes in both natural and man-made water systems, use of pesticides and household chemicals, excessive human visitation, and accumulation of waste.

II.

UNESCO has emphasized in many documents that the World Heritage can be protected in the long term only with the involvement of local communities:

The *World Heritage Convention* itself specifies in Article 5 that "each State Party [to this Convention] shall endeavour (a) to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community..."

The "*New Directives Concerning UNESCO's Partnership with Non-Governmental Organizations*", numerous other UNESCO and World Heritage policy documents of the World Heritage Committee express the need that "relevant communities be actively involved in the identification, management and conservation of all World Heritage sites".

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<sup>1</sup> Adopted as the Final Document of the International Conference "The UNESCO World Heritage and the Role of Civil Society" held in Bonn, Germany, 26-27 June, 2015

In its *Budapest Declaration*, the World Heritage Committee has identified five key strategic directions (the so-called 5 Cs), among them to

- increase public awareness, involvement and support for the World Heritage through **C**ommunication, and
- enhance the role of **C**ommunities in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

The *Strategic Action Plan for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention 2012-2022* states that it is important to ensure that local, national and international communities feel a connection to, are engaged with, and benefit from the world's cultural and natural heritage. The plan emphasizes a need for greater dialogue on tentative lists, the preparation of nominations, evaluation processes and inscriptions as well as conservation and monitoring.

The *Final Report on the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention*, "The Kyoto Vision: A Call for Action", recommends strengthening relationships with communities in order to integrate cultural, social, economic and environmental considerations with a perspective of sustainable development and benefit-sharing for the local population, without which it would be difficult to ensure the outstanding universal values of the World Heritage.

III.

World Heritage Watch has been established as a non-governmental organization in order to build a global network of Civil Society Actors (CSAs)<sup>2</sup> and Indigenous Peoples who support the protection and expansion of the network of World Heritage sites, and to better bring their concerns to the attention of the World Heritage Committee and its Advisory Bodies, States Parties and the general public.

At the invitation of World Heritage Watch, 125 representatives of non-governmental organizations, local communities, indigenous peoples, concerned individuals, academic experts, students and international organizations, from 34 countries and all continents, came together at the International Conference "The UNESCO World Heritage and the Role of Civil Society" on 26-27 June 2015 in Bonn, Germany. We discussed and formulated our views on how civil society actors and indigenous peoples can best participate in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, and how the World Heritage could best benefit from the involvement and contribution of civil society and indigenous peoples.

As a result of our deliberations, we have compiled our findings in the 12 points below, which will guide our strategic work on World Heritage in the future.

## **1. Civil Society and the World Heritage Committee**

We believe it is vital, consistent with the practices and policies of the United Nations, and in the interest of an effective implementation of the World Heritage Convention, to build systematic links between CSAs and World Heritage, for collaboration to enhance the role of CSAs in the work of the Convention. Joining forces wherever possible is necessary in order to maximize effects in

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<sup>2</sup> **Civil Society Actors (CSAs)** are understood here to include non-governmental organizations, individuals, informal groups and local communities who are not part, and do not act on behalf, of state institutions. **Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** are those CSAs which have formalized structures. These would include non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other non-profit bodies who are unrelated to governments. **Indigenous peoples** are rights-holders with internationally recognized rights beyond those of civil society.

the safeguarding of World Heritage. Working actively in the field, CSAs are involved in the investing of hundreds of millions of dollars each year for the conservation and protection of individual World Heritage properties.

We call upon the Statutory Bodies of the World Heritage Convention to show support and recognition of CSAs by urging States Parties to grant increased consideration and appreciation of the civil society sector.

It is essential for building future cooperation that the World Heritage Committee express acknowledgment of the role Civil Society Actors play in the implementation of the Convention, and to establish a formal process of dialogue between the World Heritage Centre, Advisory Bodies and CSAs ensuring the effective inclusion of CSAs in the procedures, processes and structures of the World Heritage Convention.

## **2. International Civil Society Network**

An open list of CSAs with relevant knowledge, expertise, or particular interest related to World Heritage properties should be established. This list may help the World Heritage Committee and UNESCO in identifying and contacting relevant CSAs.

CSAs with expertise in the conservation and management of, or advocacy for, World Heritage properties should be accorded Permanent Observer status to attend and engage at the sessions of the World Heritage Committee, and that such status be made automatic for NGOs with General or Special Consultative Status with ECOSOC. We recommend that CSAs be able to participate actively in the sessions of the World Heritage Committee.

## **3. Credibility - Transparency and Access to Information**

In order for civil society to play its role in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention as well as in the conservation and management of World Heritage properties, it needs access to all relevant information. A more open communication between the Statutory Bodies on the one hand and Civil Society Actors on the other, with accessibility of information, would be beneficial to achieving the aims of the Convention.

Recalling the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, which has become a standard-setting instrument for the right to official information, we request that the World Heritage Committee and UNESCO urgently establish the necessary procedures to align transparency and accountability in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, including in the identification, monitoring and management of World Heritage properties and in the processing of World Heritage nominations. Such procedures should include, inter alia, the principle that Tentative Lists, World Heritage nomination files, strategy and planning documents, evaluation and mission reports should be made publicly available in full as soon as they have been accepted by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre or Advisory Bodies.

We ask the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention to adhere to principles and best practices of openness, transparency and civic participation in all administrative planning, and emphasize that the most effective measures for participation can be taken when there is early access to information on real and potential projects affecting World Heritage properties and those having potential for World Heritage listing.

#### **4. Tentative Lists and Nomination Procedures**

More encouragement should be given to implement the upstream processes in the preparation for both World Heritage Tentative Lists and nominations. It is essential that the opinion of local populations be actively engaged during these processes, acknowledging the fact that they are the people who coexist daily with the World Heritage property. In general, a proactive and preventive approach should be taken in safeguarding all natural and cultural heritage and especially those properties envisaged for inscription so that local and indigenous communities and governments are prepared for managing, monitoring and preserving the property after inscription. Essential standards of conservation, management, human and financial resources, equipment, and public participation must be achieved and demonstrated before a property can be inscribed in the World Heritage List.

For the successful conservation, management and sustainable development of World Heritage properties it is essential to understand the rights, needs, values and aspirations of communities that would be affected by an inscription. As part of the nomination process, local communities and other CSAs should be fully informed, in a timely fashion, and consulted about the implications of World Heritage status, and the free, prior and informed consent should be obtained from indigenous peoples, before further pursuing the nomination. No property should be inscribed against the stated will of a majority local population.

Effective consultation and participation of local communities and indigenous peoples during the preparation of World Heritage nominations should be ensured through a wide range of extensive participatory processes and tools, as a means to collectively define the complex system of values that will need to be protected over time, and to create a commitment for a common vision both for heritage preservation and sustainable development. In this context, the intangible values related to the tangible ones, as perceived by the local community, should be fully considered in nominations.

#### **5. Environment and Sustainable Development**

As human impact on natural systems and cycles increases, both natural and cultural heritage and cultural landscapes come under growing pressure from environmental factors. To better understand, mitigate and reduce human-induced environmental threats to cultural and natural heritage is a mounting challenge. Realizing sustainable lifestyles is becoming of critical importance in this context, and this will not be achieved without active involvement of local communities and indigenous peoples.

We therefore welcome the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the UNESCO Sustainable Development Strategy for the World Heritage Convention, and we applaud UNESCO's determined efforts to include the conservation of the world's natural and cultural heritage in the SDGs. While there can be no sustainable development without the conservation of natural and cultural heritage, there cannot be a successful conservation of natural and cultural heritage outside a general context of sustainable development either. The SDGs' call to strengthen efforts to protect the world's natural and cultural heritage opens a great opportunity to integrate the preservation of cultural and natural heritage in national and international sustainable development policies and programs.

We support sustainable development efforts that benefit local communities, highlighting traditional resource use and local creative industries. All efforts should be made to ensure that World Heritage properties will not be harmed by development projects, taking the precautionary principle fully into account. Many of our organizations have extensive on-the-ground experience

in integrating sustainable development and conservation, and we are fully convinced that such strategies will benefit from a systematic consultation with, and full participation of, civil society and indigenous peoples. In this context, traditional materials and small-scale technologies and systems must be investigated, refined and applied with priority. We look forward to working with the World Heritage Committee, UNESCO, the Advisory Bodies and States Parties towards this end.

Full socio-economic and ethnographic studies should precede all World Heritage nominations in order to recognize the living dynamics in heritage sites, and the multiple layers and identities, the views and nature of all affected communities, ensuring that there is a balance of interests. Moreover, populations near heritage sites are frequently vulnerable, and it is vital to recognize and care for the socio-economic situation of already disenfranchised people.

We call upon all relevant donors to include the sustainable development of the socio-economic environment of World Heritage properties in their agendas, and to give them highest priority in the implementation of their development programmes. Safeguarding World Heritage properties through conservation measures alone, in isolation from their spatial, socio-cultural and economic context, has meant a continuing struggle with local communities and a permanent financial burden on public budgets. It leads to an alienation of people from their heritage, and is eventually bound to fail.

Instead, Culture in general and World Heritage in particular must be considered nuclei and motors of sustainable development from which local communities rightfully expect to derive an economic benefit. Especially in remote and economically disadvantaged regions, their importance for regional development can hardly be overestimated. They create jobs far beyond conservation: in land use, tourism, administration, monitoring, education, architecture and construction, PR and IT, culture and entertainment, arts and crafts, and technical professions of all kind. A thriving socio-economic development around World Heritage properties will raise the funds required for their conservation, relieve public budgets, and will therefore be the best guarantee for their continuing protection.

## **6. Evaluation, Monitoring and Reporting**

We greatly appreciate the work of the Advisory Bodies on the evaluation, monitoring and reporting of the World Heritage properties, in spite of significant budgetary constraints. We fully support the role of the Advisory Bodies to provide science-based expertise as the principal basis for the decision-making by the Committee.

Partly due to this lack of funding, many of the Advisory Bodies' evaluation and monitoring missions are too short, and carried out by experts insufficient in numbers to inspect the properties, meet with officials and civil society, carry out surveys, study documents, and check all information to the extent necessary in order to be able to provide a comprehensive and fully reliable assessment of all aspects of the property's condition. In particular, the lack of time does not allow for the recognition of ongoing hidden dynamics which would reveal a deeper understanding of potential and subliminal threats to the property, and allow preventive action to be taken before situations culminate in crisis.

It should also be ensured that every mission have access to experts on legal-administrative framework and management, and that evaluations not only check documents but more importantly compare them with existing capacities and actual implementation. Gaps between objectives and actions of management plans and reality need to be addressed more consistently and more frequently. There is an important role for civil society to help achieve balanced

evaluations based on long-term observation, and to assess the incremental benefits of World Heritage status compared to other protected heritage sites.

In summary, all evaluation, reporting and monitoring missions should include extensive communication with civil society, and that all CSAs and indigenous peoples have sufficient and independent access to missions. Civil Society Actors should have the opportunity to comment on all reports and draft decisions before they are adopted, as well as submitting independent opinions, and such comments and reports should be made available to all those who receive the official reports and draft decisions.

## **7. Management and Management Plans**

Management plans or mechanisms are key tools for the successful safeguarding of World Heritage properties. There is an urgent need to build the capacity of site management staff as a vital tool to improve the management of World Heritage properties, as well as that of local communities in order to ensure their effective grass-roots participation. We look forward to working in the future with the World Heritage Centre, Advisory Bodies and States Parties to support programmes such as the Africa Nature Programme, the capacity-building programme for natural sites in Africa, and comparable programmes for cultural heritage.

Management Plans or mechanisms should be developed in a fully participatory manner through consultation processes, workshops or pedagogical methodologies, based on clear and detailed requirements and standards.

There are convincing examples that local communities can play a positive role in the management of properties, e.g. by providing expertise, forming volunteer groups, citizen research, act as heritage guardians and promoters, organize events, raise funds, and much more. We invite the World Heritage Committee and States Parties to explore the benefits of such co-management approaches, to encourage the forming of citizen initiatives in this field, and to support them in every possible way. Management Plans should also be made available to the public in order to allow learning from best practices.

## **8. Communication - Information and Awareness-raising**

More often than not, local populations and administrations have little knowledge why their heritage site is on the World Heritage List, who is responsible for its funding, conservation and management, and what the restrictions are that inevitably come with World Heritage status. This is equally true for natural and cultural properties, and for developed and developing countries.

In order to enable civil society to participate effectively in the identification, nomination, conservation and management of World Heritage properties, there is a need to raise awareness of the values involved, and to improve knowledge about both the World Heritage regime of governance in general and the World Heritage properties in particular.

Information and awareness-raising are continuing tasks, and require the establishment of permanent contact points as well as measures which effectively reach out to the people concerned. Such campaigns should be applied also during the nomination procedures as part of increasing "preparedness" of local communities as indicated in Article 111 of the Operational Guidelines. They should include information about, and discussion of, inter alia,

- the nature and importance of the World Heritage Convention as an instrument of international and national law;

- the difference between World Heritage properties and other protective instruments in terms of conservation requirements;
- key terms such as "Outstanding Universal Value", "integrity" and "authenticity";
- providing clear and understandable definitions and cultural taxonomy to allow for a better transfer of knowledge;
- descriptions of responsibilities and authorities of all institutions involved, and of all relevant procedures in management, monitoring and reporting, so as to explain to civil society actors their options for getting involved.

## **9. Governance of the World Heritage Convention**

### The World Heritage Committee

The overall impression of the work of the World Heritage Convention and the World Heritage Committee is its slow pace of action, and an attitude of reactivity rather than proactivity. In too many cases intervention comes too late to prevent serious adverse impacts on World Heritage properties.

We request the World Heritage Committee to pay greater attention to early signs of risks and threats, especially when indicated by civil society, to take more preventive action, to make its recommendations and decisions more precise and coherent, to be more determined and rigorous when following up on the implementation of its recommendations and decisions, and to link its work with States Parties with the basic human right to the enjoyment of culture and heritage and a healthy natural environment. Further clarification and increased binding force are needed for the implementation of Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines.

In order to facilitate the implementation of both the World Heritage Convention and the Decisions of the World Heritage Committee, we encourage the Committee to request States Parties to adopt certain international standards and documents upon which the work of the Convention is built explicitly or implicitly, for example the concepts of "cultural landscape" and "historic urban landscape", the Valetta Principles and the Faro Convention.

### The Advisory Bodies

We encourage the Advisory Bodies to better connect with the work of civil society organizations. In order to operate in a transparent and credible fashion as an impartial and independent body, we recommend that only experts who are not staff of state institutions be allowed to work on behalf of an Advisory Body in World Heritage matters.

### Funding

We are deeply concerned about the lack of funding of the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies. A sharply reduced staff and operational budget must deal with a steadily growing number of World Heritage properties and challenges of hitherto unseen dimensions, resulting in an unsustainable situation and putting the World Heritage at great risk. The World Heritage Centre can no longer meet its tasks without professional staff specialized in all fields of culture and nature - and, in addition, human rights, social sciences and administration.

We call upon UNESCO, the World Heritage Committee and States Parties to make more determined efforts to expand the budgetary funds for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

## **10. The List of World Heritage in Danger**

Inscription on the List of Sites in Danger is not perceived in the same way by all States Parties or by Civil Society. Some countries apply for, or willingly accept the inscription of a site to focus international attention on its problems and to obtain expert assistance in solving them - and gain important international recognition when those properties are removed from the list. Others wish to avoid such a designation.

The List of World Heritage in Danger is an important and useful mechanism to draw national and international attention to management deficiencies or external pressures likely to affect the long-term integrity and authenticity of properties that have been accorded World Heritage status. For multiple reasons, however, insufficient action is being taken to remove many World Heritage properties from the Danger List, some of which have been languishing there for 10 years or more. One of the unfortunate results of that inaction is a weakening of the Convention.

Several of our organizations have prioritized efforts to help secure the removal of targeted sites from the List of World Heritage in Danger. We look forward to continuing to provide targeted States Parties with technical guidance and support in the preparation of the Desired State of Conservation for Removal (DSOCR) framework, and by helping to ensure that Parties can implement a set of required and necessary corrective measures. We are keen to coordinate with UNESCO, the Advisory Bodies and the relevant State Parties to mobilize the funds necessary for such work, and we call upon international donors to make the removal of properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger a priority of their agenda.

## **11. The Global Strategy**

We consider the Global Strategy for a Balanced World Heritage to be of tremendous relevance for the credibility of the Convention, and therefore for the World Heritage as a whole. We deplore that since its inception in 1994, no significant progress towards the goal of the Strategy can be seen, urge the World Heritage Committee to take much stronger measures towards its achievement, and declare that we are ready to work with the Committee for their adoption and implementation.

Nature conservation organizations have already been actively engaged with priority-setting processes and efforts, globally, regionally, and at the national level. At the global level, several of us have engaged in such processes through IUCN (e.g., Key Biodiversity Areas, Species Survival Commission, and World Commission on Protected Areas), the Convention on Biological Diversity, and other fora and organizations. We stand ready to provide input to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, IUCN, ICOMOS and governments, including technical support to State Parties in reviewing their tentative lists and in the possible preparation of nominations (as many of us have already done in many cases).

## **12. Indigenous Peoples**

Recognizing the special position of indigenous peoples in both legal and practical respects, we request the World Heritage Committee to ensure that all procedures under the Convention fully respect the rights of indigenous peoples, and endorse the Call to Action of the International Expert Workshop on the World Heritage Convention and Indigenous Peoples (Copenhagen 2012). Many of the recommendations made in this document are of relevance to indigenous peoples and non-indigenous communities alike. We would like to highlight the following recommendations:



1. That the World Heritage Committee urgently establish an open and transparent process, with the direct, full and effective participation of indigenous peoples, to elaborate changes to the current procedures and Operational Guidelines, and other appropriate measures to ensure that the implementation of the World Heritage Convention is consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and a human rights-based approach. Such changes should affirm and guarantee, among other points, the free, prior and informed consent of indigenous peoples, prior to any tentative listing or inscription of a World Heritage site incorporating or affecting their lands, territories or resources; and the recognition of indigenous peoples as rights-holders and not merely stakeholders;
2. That the World Heritage Committee establish, with the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples, a public list of those sites on the States Parties Tentative Lists and on the World Heritage List which may affect the rights, lands, territories or resources of indigenous peoples;
3. That States Parties, UNESCO and the World Heritage Committee provide sufficient financial and other resources to effectively support and advance the full realization of the rights of indigenous peoples in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention and the measures outlined in the Call for Action, and of the provisions of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in all matters concerning the World Heritage Convention;
4. That the World Heritage Committee establish, with the full and effective participation of indigenous peoples and through an open and transparent process, an advisory mechanism consisting of indigenous experts, to assist in the implementation of measures to ensure that all actions related to the World Heritage Convention uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples;
5. That the World Heritage Committee issue a standing invitation, and provide support to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to participate in, and effectively contribute to its sessions;
6. That States Parties and the World Heritage Committee urgently respond to and redress conditions within existing World Heritage sites where human rights violations or conflicts continue to affect indigenous peoples;
7. That the World Heritage Committee request the Advisory Bodies to include experts on indigenous peoples' rights on their World Heritage Panels and as desk reviewers of all nominations affecting indigenous peoples;
8. That States Parties ensure the equitable and effective participation of indigenous peoples in the management of World Heritage sites within indigenous peoples' lands and territories, and support indigenous peoples' own initiatives to develop administration and management systems;
9. That States Parties ensure that the benefits arising from the designation of indigenous peoples' lands, territories and resources as World Heritage sites are defined by, and genuinely accrue to the indigenous peoples concerned, in a fair and equitable manner.

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