

Extended 44th Session of the World Heritage Committee

Oral statement on Item 7B.73 Ahwar of Iraq

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Representing Save the Tigris, a coalition of civil society organizations from nine countries concerned with the protection of the Ahwar of Southern Iraq, we would like to comment on Decision 7B.73:

- On 12 May 2021 the World Heritage Centre received two notes from the State Party of Turkey relevant for the Ahwar of Iraq. They included clarifications regarding recent transboundary water management between Iraq and Turkey as well as notes on the alterations of the Iraqi Marshes over time. We call on the World Heritage Committee to make these notes publicly available for civil society.
- We support the call to suspend work on Makhoul Dam as soon as possible. The State Party of Iraq re-launched this dam project without adequate transparency or consultations.
- We welcome the request of the World Heritage Center to request the State Parties of Iraq, Iran and Turkey to undertake a Strategic Environmental Assessment. We believe the World Heritage Center should request for this assessment to focus specifically on existing and planned dams in the Tigris-Euphrates basin.
- We recommend the World Heritage Center to request the State Party of Iraq to take measures to further strengthen law enforcement in the Marshes in order to protect biodiversity, particularly Law No. 27 of 2009 "For the Protection and Improvement of the Environment" which was adopted a decade ago but is lacking enforcement.
- Oil spills can be observed in the areas surrounding the Marshes, including heavy waste from the oil waters in the rivers feeding the Marshes. The State Party of Iraq should share Environmental Impact Assessments adjacent to the property with the World Heritage Centre, which should verify if they meet international standards. In addition, the State Party of Iraq should clarify which specific areas in the vicinity of the site would be subjected to oil activities. Is the State Party of Iraq willing to install a moratorium on oil exploration and extraction adjacent to the property? UNESCO should clarify whether any oil developments could jeopardize the World Heritage designation of the Ahwar.

Thank you for your attention.