

## Potsdam Consultation on the Future of the World Heritage

### Final declaration

At the invitation of ARGUS Potsdam e.V. and World Heritage Watch (WHW), the "Potsdam Consultation on the Future of World Heritage" took place from 2 - 4 November 2021. It was funded by the Provincial Capital of Potsdam and took place in the "House of Nature" in Potsdam as an international, hybrid conference.

In the coming year, the UNESCO World Heritage Convention will celebrate its 50th anniversary. Ratified by virtually the entire international community, it is an incomparable success story. A large number of nature reserves and cultural monuments would probably not have been preserved without being inscribed on the World Heritage List, monitored by UNESCO and supported by the international community.

In the meantime, the number of world heritage sites has grown to 1,154 sites worldwide. The enormous popularity of this award, however, threatens to become its greatest threat. Based on the experience gathered by its network of over 200 civil society actors around the globe, World Heritage Watch has therefore comprehensively analyzed the situation of the World Heritage and identified the urgent need for reform in 12 subject areas in order to protect the sites for the next 50 years and to uphold the credibility of the world heritage list.

World Heritage Watch discussed its analyses and suggestions at the Potsdam Consultation with deserving World Heritage "pioneers" from almost every continent - former high-ranking employees of UNESCO, the World Heritage Committee and World Heritage Center and its Advisory Bodies - who have been successfully leading the work for the World Heritage for the past 30 years in decision-making positions.

As a result of a detailed discussion with the "pioneers", we urgently call on the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, the World Heritage Committee and the Advisory Bodies ICOMOS (International Monument Council), IUCN (World Conservation Union) and ICCROM (International Council for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments) to take action in order to address worrying developments in the following areas:

### **Reform of the working modalities of the World Heritage Convention**

#### **• Strengthen professional decisions against non-professional interests**

The World Heritage Committee is increasingly taking decisions against the recommendations of its Advisory Bodies and, in response to pressure from individual members, overrules draft decisions of its own secretariat. This increasing politicization of decision-making processes must be countered and the expertise of specialists must be given more weight again in order to stop the visible erosion of the credibility of the World Heritage List.

#### **• Prevent loss of value due to inflation of the list**

An inflation of the World Heritage List through unlimited growth (by two dozen additional sites annually) and qualitatively questionable selection processes must be prevented. In the medium term, the question of limiting the list must be raised, while at the same time achieving the goal of greater regional balance. Those countries in Europe that already have many sites on the World Heritage List are therefore called upon to consider a temporary nomination moratorium. In view of the increasing threats to the World Heritage sites from a variety of new types of dangers, the protection, preservation and development of the already designated World Heritage sites must be given priority over the registration of new sites.

- **Codify the rights of civil society**

Civil society is becoming increasingly important in the protection and preservation of World Heritage sites. With hundreds of millions of Euros annually, non-governmental organizations contribute significantly to the preservation of the sites. Their commitment to their respective World Heritage sites can significantly strengthen and guarantee their preservation. The decision that civil society should be involved in all World Heritage processes from nomination on must be implemented by all States Parties. Educational offers must increase the population's understanding and appreciation of World Heritage sites.

As in many other conventions, the role and rights of non-governmental organizations need to be codified in the statutes of the convention. They should have access to all documents, their requests and reports should be kept on file and incorporated transparently into the decisions of the committee. As part of the annual meeting of the World Heritage Committee, information and speaking rights before resolutions are adopted should be guaranteed, as well as the inclusion of a regular agenda item with reports from civil society.

- **Expand the financing of the world heritage in solidarity**

Overall, the UNESCO World Heritage system is severely underfunded at the international, national and local levels. Funds do not increase in step with the increasing demands of the growing list of World Heritage Sites. In order to make World Heritage sites fit for the future, their preservation and the exploitation of their development potential must be included as a separate topic in the programs of international donors. With inscription on the World Heritage List, a site becomes the "common heritage of humanity". This means that the international community has a responsibility that must be reflected in development policy funding guidelines and the allocation of funds.

- **Deepen cooperation with other conventions**

The goals of the World Heritage Convention partly coincide with those of international environmental conventions, and they also affect human rights in particular: the nomination and protection of World Heritage sites must, under all circumstances, respect human rights, especially those of indigenous peoples and cultural minorities. In this sense, a mutual reporting obligation should be introduced between the World Heritage Convention, the Human Rights Conventions and the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

- **Reform the guidelines for nominations, management and monitoring**

In the nomination dossiers of World Heritage sites, there is often a lack of crucial information on the basis of which a subsequent monitoring of their state of conservation can take place, for example lists of the objects that embody the outstanding universal value of the site, or specifications for the human, material and financial resources of the sites. Monitoring missions often cannot achieve their goals because they are delayed, too short, or understaffed, or because their mandate does not cover important areas such as the violation of human rights. By increasing the requirements for protection, management, and funding of the World Heritage Sites prior to inscription, many later problems can be avoided.

## **Contributions of World Heritage Sites to Sustainable Development**

- **Make tourism plans binding to protect against overtourism**

World Heritage Sites are being preserved so that they can be visited for purposes of education and enjoyment. In addition, tourism is the main source of income not only for the sites themselves, but also for the nearby population. In recent years, however, tourism has gained the upper hand in many places (overtourism) and threatens to become a threat to World Heritage sites. Therefore, tourism plans developed in a participatory manner should become a binding requirement for all World Heritage sites in order to define and adhere to a sustainable level of tourist use.

- **Make the establishment of buffer zones legally binding**

Buffer zones are essential for the visual integrity and protection of world heritage sites; their designation must therefore become a mandatory requirement for inscription on the World Heritage List. Clear and binding principles for their demarcation are required so that they can be easily

understood by the local population, especially in nature reserves, and easily monitored by the local supervising authorities. Binding regulations and standards for buffer zones, which can be checked by the World Heritage Committee on the basis of clear criteria, should be laid down in the Operational Guidelines.

- **Support sustainable development**

The general specification of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which applies to all countries, should be given special priority in the buffer zones as model regions. To this end, local administrations and private stakeholders must be provided with practical instructions on how sustainable development can be realized in practice at their sites. To this end, opportunities for economic cooperation and development aid must be used. This gives the local population the opportunity to develop new sources of income in the vicinity of the World Heritage sites, thereby winning them over as supporters of the World Heritage and at the same time keeping non-sustainable interests away.

- **Strengthen influence against dams in water catchment areas**

Dams are often justified as a climate-friendly energy generation technology while dramatically contributing to the destruction of habitats, biodiversity and arable land. Special regulations need to be identified for possible threats to World Heritage waters from dams located far upstream or large-scale irrigation projects in their water catchment areas. Strategic World Heritage Impact Assessments must be submitted to the World Heritage Committee for such projects.

- **Strengthen the role of World Heritage sites in tackling the climate crisis**

The World Heritage Convention requires States Parties to do “everything in their power” to protect their sites. Since the climate crisis threatens almost all World Heritage sites, States Parties also have a legally binding obligation under the World Heritage Convention to do everything in their power to counter the climate crisis. At the same time, World Heritage sites offer excellent reference areas of high biodiversity for observing climate change, as they have been particularly protected and well researched for a long time.

- **Develop guidelines for change in cultural landscapes**

Historically grown cultural landscapes are living landscapes that preserve their traditional forms of settlement and architecture, use of land and natural resources, ways of life and often spiritual traditions related to places. World Heritage cultural landscapes must be large enough to be representative functional units. At the same time, they are exposed to the changes that modern developments bring. Guidelines must therefore be developed as to how far changes in the cultural landscape can go in order to still be in harmony with its traditional character, and how the population can be supported in maintaining a balance between tradition and modernity.

ARGUS Potsdam e.V. and World Heritage Watch would like to thank all participants and especially the Potsdam Provincial Capital and World Heritage for making this excellent consultation possible.

In a next step, the 12 issue papers and their reform proposals will be discussed within the framework of the global WHW network, in order to find ways of introducing them into the decision-making process of the convention as a contribution to its 50th anniversary.

Potsdam, 4 November, 2021