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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE  
WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

BUREAU OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Twentieth session  
UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, Room X (Fontenoy)

24 - 29 June 1996

**Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda: Decentralization of World  
Heritage activities**

1. As requested by the Committee at its nineteenth session (Berlin 1995), when it decided to include this item on the agenda of the next session of its Bureau, this working document is intended to inform the Bureau about UNESCO's decentralization policy and its eventual implications for the Centre.

2. The factual presentation of the current situation, which this working document aims to provide, consists of: (i) a brief recapitulation of UNESCO's basic decentralization policy, as expressed in its Medium-Term Strategy 1996-2001 and the Approved Programme and Budget 1996-1997, and (ii) a more detailed information on the Nordic World Heritage Office in Oslo.

**UNESCO's decentralization policy**

3. As stated in the Medium-Term Strategy 1996-2001, the principal objective of decentralization is to serve Member States more effectively by responding to their specific needs and particular circumstances, while drawing full benefit from the wealth of knowledge, experience and ideas accumulated or generated throughout the world. It is also intended to ensure the active presence of the Organization at the country level along with other agencies and funds of the United Nations system and relevant intergovernmental, and international non-governmental organizations. It further states that one of the most important functions of the Field Offices is to maintain interactive relations with relevant national partners and with the local

United Nations and donors' representatives, in order to provide technical support and policy advice to Member States, especially as regards identification and implementation of extrabudgetary projects.

4. Stressing furthermore the importance of the Secretariat's co-operation with National Commissions, which have to play a leading role in the Organization's decentralization efforts, the policy adopted by the General Conference at its 28th session is geared to creating new partnerships with non-governmental organizations and other representatives of civil society, with a view to ensuring the sustainability and multiplier effect of the Organization's activities, (28 C/5 Approved, p. xi).

5. The World Heritage Centre has, since its creation, used extensively the existing network of UNESCO's Field Offices and the Member States' National Commissions in the implementation of its tasks. These are particularly active in the preparation and the implementation of technical assistance projects funded by the World Heritage Fund, the Centre's promotional and educational programme as well as in all other activities.

#### **The Nordic World Heritage Office in Oslo**

6. As stated in the agreement between UNESCO and the Government of Norway, signed on 27 June 1995, the World Heritage Office in Norway is established as a three-year pilot project. Its objectives and functions, having been previously agreed upon also by other Nordic countries, include: to deepen the understanding of the mankind/nature/culture relationship and of the concept of sustainable development and of heritage conservation; to encourage ratification of acceptance of the World Heritage Convention by countries not yet States Parties; to promote the implementation of the Convention through the provision of a focal point for the development of an international network; to establish clearing-house facilities as an integral part of UNESCO's World Heritage Centre information system; to assist in the identification and nomination of World Heritage properties, and to contribute to global and thematic studies intended to increase the representation of the World Heritage List; to assist in the monitoring and management of the state of conservation of properties on the World Heritage List; to mobilize international assistance for the protection and conservation of World Heritage properties, including training of specialists; to promote educational projects linked to heritage conservation; to seek funding and to help establish mechanisms for rapid response to emergency situations; and to seek cooperation with intergovernmental organizations as ICCROM and non-governmental organizations, particularly ICOMOS and IUCN.

7. The Office became operational on 1 March 1996. It has three full-time and three part-time staff from the Nordic countries. Ms Anne-Kristin Endresen has been appointed as its Director. The staff and the running costs of the Office are financed entirely by the Norwegian Government.

8. The Office's Strategy for 1996-1998, and its Action Plan for 1996 have been inspired by the findings of the Brundtland Commission's report **Our Common Future** (1986), and those of the De Cuellar Commission on Culture and Development, entitled **Our Creative Diversity** (1995). It consists of two major dimensions: (i) the Nordic dimension, and (ii) the international dimension.

9. As regards the Nordic dimension, a project group appointed by the Nordic Council of Ministers will submit a report in spring 1996 on the potential Nordic nominations to the List, primarily natural sites. The proposed sites are seen from within a Nordic perspective, in terms of how they, together with the cultural sites already inscribed, can represent characteristics of culture and landscape of the Nordic countries.

10. A central assignment for the period of 1996-98 will be the preparation and publication of a state of conservation report of all Nordic World Heritage sites. It will likewise contribute to highlighting methods and procedures for monitoring and reporting work generally, and to further analysis and comparison between individual sites in regard to their specific context. The report will be completed by the end of 1998.

11. On the basis of the existing ICOMOS, IUCN and WHC networks, the Office will create an experts' network with specific input from the Nordic countries. The national expertise database which is currently being developed by the Ministry of Environment of Norway will be available to the Office. Likewise, several regional seminars and workshops are planned. A workshop on natural sites and cultural landscapes will be taking place in the autumn of 1996 together with the WHC, IUCN and ICOMOS. Further planned activities include a Monitoring Seminar for World Heritage site managers, a Hansa Cities Seminar and a Baltic Seminar.

#### **International Dimension**

12. The aim of the Office is to establish an effective communication and collaboration with the national agencies, notably DANIDA, FINIDA, NORAD and SIDA in order to contribute towards an optimal use of resources and prevent overlap of projects.

13. The Office intends to contribute towards the emerging Global Strategy of the World Heritage Committee in particular with regard to the World Heritage sites in Southern Africa and South East Asia. Its involvement may include workshops, strategy meetings and expert assistance as well as funding negotiations. The Office may also coordinate individual projects from Nordic countries which are relevant to the NWHO and the WHC international strategy. The overall aim is to establish a common Nordic platform for this work with the particular emphasis on the balance between nature and culture and the balance between North and South.

14. The Nordic World Heritage Office will cooperate daily with the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and mobilize support for international assistance projects. It will also seek close partnership with the advisory bodies to the Convention and other governmental and non-governmental organizations.