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**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
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**CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

Thirty second Session

**Quebec City, Canada
2 – 10 July 2008**

Item 11 of the Provisional Agenda: Follow up on the Periodic Report for Arab States

INF.11B: Report on the proposal for the establishment of an Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage

SUMMARY

This document provides information on the proposal for the establishment of an Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage

Proposal for the establishment of an "Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage", under the auspices of UNESCO (Category 2)

Introduction:

The rapidly growing importance of the preservation of cultural legacy and of the safeguarding of the natural resources of the planet has highlighted the important role of the wide development of international cooperation by UNESCO in order for the Organisation to accomplish its mission. Category 2 centres placed under the auspices of UNESCO are strongly assisting the implementation of UNESCO programmes, both financially and technically, and supporting the protection and promotion of the cultural and natural heritage in all its forms. The Kingdom of Bahrain wishes to reinforce this assistance by establishing, in Bahrain, a centre to help achieve the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention* in the Arab Region. This centre would be created with the idea of being a component of the already wide international network of Category 2 UNESCO centres, and promoting the exchange of experiences and technical resources.

Background:

The Periodic Report on the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention* in the Arab Region (submitted to the World Heritage Committee in 2000) revealed the need to enhance the knowledge of the *World Heritage Convention*, the application of the *Operational Guidelines* and the cooperation between the States Parties of the region.

The Kingdom of Bahrain believes that the establishment of a centre with regional scope would be of major benefit by providing information about the *World Heritage Convention*, training on its application and bringing together professionals from all the Arab States to cooperate in the fields relating to heritage conservation and management. Such a structure would also reinforce the cooperation with international organizations, with other States Parties outside the Arab Region, which might be interested in exchanging experience and information, and finally with other similar regional centres elsewhere in the world thus creating a network for the benefit of all.

In July 2007, on the occasion of an official visit of the Head of Culture and National Heritage of Bahrain to the People's Republic of China, the Bahraini delegation visited the World Heritage Training and Research Institute for the Asia and the Pacific Region (WHTRI-AP), meeting the experts of this institution (at Peking University, in Beijing, and at Tongji University in Shanghai) who presented the role of the institute and its activities for the reinforcement of the *World Heritage Convention* at regional level.

Following this visit and its election as a member of the World Heritage Committee, for the first time, in October 2007, the Kingdom of Bahrain decided to launch an action plan for World Heritage by drafting a proposal of establishment of regional centre, in Bahrain, for the reinforcement of the implementation of the World Heritage Convention in the Arab Region.

This proposal was presented on 29 January 2008 to the Director-General of UNESCO who welcomed its principle and the suggestion of Bahrain to submit it to the World Heritage Committee at its 32nd session. The Director of the World Heritage Centre and the Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee also attended the meeting, held at UNESCO Headquarters.

On 19 and 20 February 2008, a consultation meeting was held in Bahrain to develop the proposal presented to the Director-General of UNESCO. Representatives of the World Heritage Centre, the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and

Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the World Conservation Union (IUCN), the Nordic World Heritage Foundation (NWHF), the African World Heritage Fund (AWHF), the World Heritage Institute for Training and Research – Asia and Pacific (WHITR-AP), the Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation (RLICC) as well as international experts were invited to participate in the meeting.

The outcomes of the above-mentioned meetings provided the Kingdom of Bahrain with useful elements for the development of its proposal to the World Heritage Committee, in view of the establishment of an "**Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage**" (referred to as "the ARC-WH" in the present document), as Category 2 centre, according to UNESCO's regulations.

Objectives:

The global objective of the ARC-WH is to assist the World Heritage Centre in the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention* in the Arab Region and to provide a means to the World Heritage Committee to improve the application of its decisions and recommendations.

The ARC-WH also aims at federating the numerous regional energies towards the promotion and preservation of the cultural and natural heritage and the mobilization of regional and international financial support for the conservation of the World Heritage Sites.

The ARC-WH would organize its activities along three main axes:

I - Information:

The absence of an Arabic version of the World Heritage Centre's official web site is a point that is regularly raised by the States Parties of the region. Several official documents have been translated into Arabic by the World Heritage Centre during the last years, such as the *Basic Texts relating to the World Heritage Convention* (including the official text of the *Convention*, the *Operational Guidelines*, the *Rules of procedure*, etc.). But a lot of useful information is not available in Arabic, such as a regularly updated version of World Heritage List, the calendar of events related to World Heritage, news, reports, promotion documents, etc. It is understood that the two official working languages of the *Convention* are French and English but, despite having the majority of the Arab States quite easily dealing with one of these two languages, the mother tongue remains the most useful way to disseminate the information in the region and reach the targeted public whether professional or general (for example with awareness raising activities and tools).

The ARC-WH would therefore assist the World Heritage Centre in the dissemination of the information relating to the World Heritage Convention and its application, by:

- 1- creating a **web site in Arabic** dedicated to World Heritage with a focus on the Arab Region. A functioning agreement would be established with the World Heritage Centre in order to define the structure and content of this web site which would make the official documents relating to the *Convention* available, as well as the World Heritage List with a focus on the sites of the region, a calendar of events, brochures and kits, a forum of exchange between the experts of the region and elsewhere and useful links to other regional and international institutions (research and conservation centres, universities, institutes, etc.);

- 2- ensuring the **translation and publication** of relevant documents dealing with World Heritage properties preservation, conservation and promotion such as proceedings – outcomes – recommendations of meetings, mission reports and technical manuals developed by the Advisory Bodies or other international specialized institutions;
- 3- being a **platform** to relay information between professionals and governmental and private institutions to promote the establishment of new disciplines at universities, in all the Arab States, relating to the conservation of heritage, its management and its development. Several renowned universities in the Middle East, chosen by many students from all the Arab States for high degree studies, could host pilot projects for the development of training methodologies and materials for the benefit of the future site managers and conservators.

II - Assistance:

Among the results of the first Periodic Reporting in the Arab Region, capacity building was raised as a priority, notably regarding the application of the World Heritage *Convention* through the content of the *Operational Guidelines*. Since the presentation of these results to the World Heritage Committee (2000), several training activities have been carried out by the World Heritage Centre at national, sub-regional and regional level. Specific modules have also been developed by ICCROM and IUCN in order to increase the efficiency of these training activities.

The World Heritage Centre regularly receives requests from States Parties for rapid help, apart from the official International Assistance, on procedure or technical issues linked to the application of the *Convention*. Having a reliable, official and recognized partner in the region would substantially reinforce the World Heritage Centre's capacity to assist the States Parties.

The ARC-WH would then be:

- 1- a **training facilitator** to assist the World Heritage Centre and the States Parties of the region in organizing, at the ARC-WH's premises or anywhere else in the region, training activities on the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*;
- 2- a **help-desk** for all the States Parties of the region, able to respond to any request of assistance in the framework of the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention*.

Both assistance fields would deal with:

- a) the policy and organisation of the *World Heritage Convention*, its vocabulary and rules of procedure
- b) the establishment and/or revision of Tentative Lists
- c) the nomination of properties for inscription on the World Heritage List
- d) the monitoring of the State of Conservation of the World Heritage properties
- e) the properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger
- f) Periodic Reporting
- g) the elaboration of International Assistance requests
- h) the World Heritage Education Programme

III - Logistic and financial support:

The implementation of activities in the framework of the *World Heritage Convention* regularly raises logistic issues to hosting States Parties and the World Heritage Centre, such as the identification of appropriate facilities and services (lecture rooms, equipment, competent translators, etc.).

The financial resources potentially provided by the World Heritage Fund for the organization of the above-mentioned activities need generally to be reinforced by the hosting States Parties or/and contributions of donors, among which State Parties via their funds in trust to UNESCO, or private organizations and foundations.

In response to these two issues, the ARC-WH would:

- 1- **be able to host** meetings, conferences, training workshops or exhibitions;
- 2- **assist** the World Heritage Centre and other international institutions in the organization of such activities in other countries of the Arab Region;
- 3- **raise funds** to support World Heritage activities in the region

Structure and legal status

The ARC-WH should enjoy on the territory of the Kingdom of Bahrain, under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the personality and legal capacity necessary for the exercise of its functions, in particular the capacity to contract, institute legal proceedings, acquire and dispose of movable and immovable property.

Constitution

The Constitution of the ARC-WH should include provisions concerning:

- (i) legal status granting to the ARC-WH, under national legislation, the autonomous legal capacity necessary to exercise its functions and to receive subventions, obtain payments for services rendered, and acquire all necessary means;
- (ii) a governing structure for the ARC-WH foreseeing UNESCO representation within its governing body.

Hosting

The ARC-WH would be temporarily hosted by the Sector of Culture and National Heritage at the Bahrain National Museum (in case it would be established before 2010), where it would enjoy the use of offices, meeting rooms, auditorium, a library, laboratories and conference room. It would then move, in 2010, to its final premises.

The ARC-WH would be linked to the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as an independent entity exerting its functions and executing its activities and programmes using its own capacity and drawing on the capabilities of the Kingdom of Bahrain's government, universities, national, regional and international research centres, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee and other governmental and nongovernmental organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain and those in the Arab Region, in accordance with national regulations.

Functioning

The Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain would take appropriate measures, in accordance with its prevailing laws and regulations, to ensure that the ARC-WH has its functions as required for UNESCO Category 2 centres. This includes:

- guidance and supervision by a Governing Board, whose membership comprises a representative of the Director-General of UNESCO and/or the Director of the World Heritage Centre. Representatives of the Arab States Parties who are members of the World Heritage Committee as well as representatives of the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee .i.e. the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM), would also be invited to be members of the Governing Board. The Head of Culture and National Heritage or his/her representative would be the Chairman of the Board of Governors;
- appointment of a Director of the ARC-WH by the Chairman of the Governing Board in consultation with the Director-General of UNESCO.

Secretariat

In addition to a Director, other staff members would be appointed according to the needs for the implementation of the programmes of the ARC-WH.

Budget and financing

The Government of the Kingdom of Bahrain would cover the costs of the facilities of the ARC-WH, including equipment, utilities, communications, secretariat staff and maintenance of infrastructure. It would also cover the costs of a certain number of "regular activities" (web site in Arabic, translation and publication, exhibitions, information material, etc.), as defined by the Governing Board. The ARC-WH would raise funds to the private sector, at national and regional levels, in order to create a fund to finance other projects. Any voluntary contribution from States Parties in or outside the Arab Region would also be deposited in this fund.

UNESCO would not be expected to contribute financially to the functioning of the institute or to finance projects apart from concrete activities and projects foreseen in its programme according to the rules of procedure of its governing bodies.

The ARC-WH might however strongly require the support of UNESCO upon its opening and the launching of its first activities as well as for the mobilization of funds.

Conclusion

The Kingdom of Bahrain, as member of the World Heritage Committee, sees the establishment of an "Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage" as a support to the action of the World Heritage Centre for an improved implementation of the World Heritage Convention in the Arab Region and one component of the network of Category 2 centres which UNESCO aims at developing for the reinforcement of its mission.