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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

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Item 7C of the Provisional Agenda: Reflection on the trends of the state of conservation

7C: Reflection on the trends of the state of conservation

SUMMARY

As indicated in Document WHC-12/36.COM/7C presented at the 36th session of the World Heritage Committee (Saint-Petersburg, 2012), in response to Decision **35 COM 7C**, the World Heritage Centre designed a project aiming at developing such Information System for all stakeholders of the *Convention*. The Flemish Government responded positively and supported this ambitious project.

In response to Decision **36 COM 7C**, this document presents the progress achieved since the 36th session in 2012 in the establishment of the online State of Conservation Information System.

Draft Decision: 37 COM 7C, see Point V.

I. INTRODUCTION

1. At its 32nd session (Quebec City, 2008), the World Heritage Committee requested the World Heritage Centre to prepare an analytical summary of the state of conservation of the properties discussed at the 32nd session, identifying perceived trends (Decision **32 COM 7B.12**).
2. After having taken note of this document, at its 33rd session (Seville, 2009), the World Heritage Committee requested the World Heritage Centre to prepare a summary of the perceived trends, changes and threats to properties based on an analytical summary of the state of conservation of World Heritage properties over five years (2005-2009) (Decision **33 COM 7C**). This document (WHC-10/34.COM/7C) was examined by the World Heritage Committee at its 34th session (Brasilia, 2010). Subsequently, the Committee welcomed the offer by the Governments of Australia and Senegal to organize an expert meeting on strategies to address global state of conservation challenges (Decision **34 COM 10D**) (Dakar, Senegal, 13-15 April 2011, see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/events/740/>).
3. At its 35th session (UNESCO, 2011), after having endorsed the recommendations of the Dakar expert meeting (Decision **35 COM 7C**) and considering "*the need for more systematic monitoring of threats*", the World Heritage Committee called upon the States Parties to the *Convention* to support the establishment of a comprehensive "State of Conservation Information System" to support analytical studies and assist all stakeholders in site management, with the target to make this system operational, on the World Heritage Centre's website, by its 37th session in 2013.
4. As indicated in Document WHC-12/36.COM/7C presented at the 36th session of the Committee (Saint-Petersburg, 2012) in response to Decision **35 COM 7C**, the World Heritage Centre designed a project aiming at developing such Information System for all stakeholders of the *Convention* and presented it to various potential donors. The Flemish Government responded positively to support this ambitious project (see page <http://unesco.flanders.be/activities>).

II. PROJECT GOALS

5. The State of Conservation Information System project aims at developing a comprehensive searchable database on the state of conservation of World Heritage properties based on the reports examined by the World Heritage Committee since 1979, year during which the first report was presented.
6. The Information System is available for all stakeholders of the *Convention* (States Parties, site managers, UNESCO, Advisory Bodies, researchers, students, members of the public, NGOs, etc.) and is hosted on the World Heritage Centre's website: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc>
7. In addition to its obvious purpose in terms of monitoring the state of conservation of properties, this Information System highly contributes to the institutional memory of the *World Heritage Convention*, Knowledge Management and facilitates well-informed and consistent decision-making as it brings to one single page all statutory information available on the state of conservation of any specific World Heritage property; information which was previously disseminated throughout a number of different documents and webpages. All the reactive monitoring history of a property can now be viewed at a glance on one single webpage.
8. This Information System also allows all involved to conduct comprehensive analyses of the threats affecting the properties and their evolution over time. These analyses will

help identify generic threats and potential trends over time and will assist States Parties to improve mitigation measures and to better protect their properties.

III. ADVANCEMENT OF THE PROJECT

A. Structure of the Information System

9. The World Heritage Centre identified all relevant material to be integrated in the Information System and developed the most appropriate structure to link it with the existing World Heritage databases. In line with Decision **35 COM 12E**, the fields required for the Information System were carefully identified to best suit the needs of the target audiences and to valorize as much as possible the existing data.
10. All the fields presented in the current state of conservation reports to the World Heritage Committee (see documents WHC-13/37.COM/7A and WHC-13/37.COM/7B for example) were therefore considered in this comprehensive database, either as new fields or through links to existing databases, whenever applicable (such as previous decisions, International Assistance granted, etc.). In addition, links were made to the existing databases, such as nomination files, maps, related statutory documents (States Parties reports, mission reports, working and information documents, etc...).
11. The Information System was established simultaneously in the two official working languages of the *Convention*, French and English. This also contributes to reach a wide target audience.
12. It is important to note that the confidentiality of the information and of documents already available on the World Heritage Centre was strictly respected. Their access levels have been maintained. No information for which the access was initially restricted to States Parties has been made public.
13. The structure of the state of conservation reports on World Heritage properties has tremendously evolved over time, improving from a few lines in the early years of the implementation of the *Convention* to a full comprehensive and detailed report in 2013. Considering the variety of state of conservation reports and content thereof, it was necessary to carefully review each report and read the related literature available (e.g. States Parties reports, mission reports, etc.) in order to retrospectively extract the relevant data; the purpose being to have comparable data over the years.
14. Finally, for the sake of comparison between properties/regions over time, all factors affecting the properties are also presented according to the standard list of factors used for the Section II of the Periodic Reporting questionnaire.
15. The main features of the Information System are presented in the Annex.

B. Access to the State of Conservation Information System

16. The State of Conservation Information System is available online on the World Heritage Centre's webpage at the following address: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc>
17. All reports integrated in the Information System are also accessible through a number of webpages on the World Heritage Centre's website by following the "State of conservation" hyperlinks.
18. The homepage of the Information System presents a brief introduction to the reactive monitoring process as well as a brief description of the Information System.
19. It was decided that the homepage should also present graphic information such as statistics on the number of reports presented each year, statistics per region or per

category of properties. Furthermore, the homepage also proposes numerous shortcuts to the information per year or per State Party through direct links.

C. Disclaimers

20. Disclaimers are used to avoid any misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the data proposed, especially to highlight that the threats indicated are listed in alphabetical order and that this order does not constitute a classification according to the level of their impact on the property.
21. A further mention also indicates that they are presented irrespective of the type of threat faced by the property, i.e. threats representing a specific and proven imminent danger (“ascertained danger”) or threats which could have deleterious effects on the property’s Outstanding Universal Value (“potential danger”).

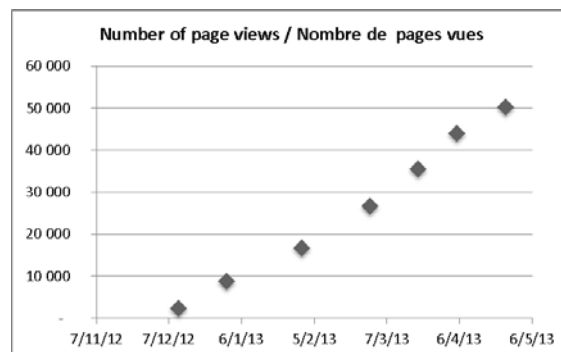
D. Status of data integration

22. This project is on-going and the data integration phase is foreseen to be completed by end of September 2013. At the time of drafting of this document, the status of progress in terms of data integration in the database is as follows:
 - a) *Period covered:* data from 1979 to 1994 and from 2004 to 2012 have been integrated. More years will be available prior to the beginning of the Committee session.
 - b) *Number of States Parties concerned:* the reports integrated concern a total of 117 States Parties.
 - c) *Number of reports:* a total number of 1,690 reports have been integrated in the Information System so far, out of an estimated total of over 2,600 reports. These do not include the reports presented to the Bureau of the Committee between 1979 and 2002. Their integration would also be very useful.
 - d) *Number of properties covered:* to date, reports on the state of conservation of 375 World Heritage properties are available. This is understandable as all 962 inscribed properties have not been subject to the reactive monitoring process.

E. Visibility

23. This Information System was made public on 5 December 2012 and specific news was released on the World Heritage Centre website: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/news/962> to promote this new and ambitious monitoring tool for World Heritage properties. This information has been relayed in over 70,000 webpages worldwide, including on the webpages of the Advisory Bodies, some ICOMOS national committees (ICOMOS-UK, ICOMOS-US), the US National Parks Services website, universities, NGOs, etc.
24. In addition, this project was promoted at a number of international meetings and conferences since Autumn 2012, such as the closing event of the 40th Anniversary of the *World Heritage Convention* (6-8 November 2012, Kyoto, Japan) through a flyer or the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe - Culture, Science, Education and Media Committee – Meeting on Europe’s endangered heritage (12 March 2013).
25. References to the Information System can now also be found in an increasing number of articles and webpages, such as Wikipedia articles, discussion fora on heritage and conservation, news articles, etc. The Information System is also starting to be used more frequently as bibliographic reference by States Parties and in publications (source: searches on Google – number of references).

26. Lastly, as of 25 April 2013, a total of over 50,200 page views has been recorded on the Information System website, up from 2,200 on 11 December 2012 (source: Google Analytics).



IV. POSSIBLE FURTHER AREAS TO IMPROVE THE STATE OF CONSERVATION INFORMATION SYSTEM

A. Future improvements to the Information System

A.1. Explanatory notes

27. A number of terms are used in the Information System, which are part of the terminology of the *World Heritage Convention* and its *Operational Guidelines*, but are very specific and not always well understood by the public. Definitions or explanations of those terms could be displayed when the cursor hovers over the relevant text.
28. Over 80 different factors affecting the properties were identified and are used in the Information System and its Advanced Search interface. However, some of the headings used for the threats are very general and would need to be specified to be better understood by all. In this sense, a list of all types of threats encompassed within each heading would be useful to provide more accurate information to the users.

A.2. Summary of discussions

29. Since its 26th session (Budapest, 2002), the reports of the World Heritage Committee sessions are no longer published as one document, but as two separate ones: the decisions adopted and the Summary Records of the debates. Only the decisions adopted by the Committee are integrated in the Information System. However, very often, the debates which took place between the Committee members, the Secretariat and the Advisory Bodies during the session are of utmost importance to understand the dynamic of the decision-making. Therefore, it would be a very useful step, for a better understanding of the issues at stake but also for institutional memory, to incorporate the summary records of the debates on each state of conservation report since 2002 in the Information System. This would affect around 1,600 reports.

A.3. World Heritage Reactive Monitoring and Periodic Reporting

30. The *World Heritage Convention* provides for two distinct monitoring processes: the Reactive Monitoring and the Periodic Reporting (see Sections IV and V of the *Operational Guidelines*). The Information System already contributes to linking these two processes by using the standard list of factors affecting the properties (Section II of the Periodic Reporting), but these synergies could go much further.
31. Indeed, the 2nd cycle of the Periodic Reporting is being conducted through an online questionnaire; all data are therefore electronically available, especially data on the factors negatively affecting the properties, as reported by the States Parties. Such data concerning a large number of properties could be made available through the

Information System and would facilitate comparing different sets of data with a common denomination (standard list of factors).

32. However, detailed data provided by States Parties through the Periodic Reporting exercise are not public for all regions, as only the analytical report is presented to the Committee; hence a Committee decision to make these reports public would be needed before such integration could proceed.

B. Wider Information and Knowledge Management initiative

33. The World Heritage Centre could explore opportunities to link the Information System to other existing relevant databases, as part of a wider Information and Knowledge Management initiative. This initiative would be in line with the Committee Decisions **33 COM 5C** and **34 COM 5E**, adopted at its 33rd (Seville, 2009) and 34th (Brasilia, 2010) sessions respectively, in which it recommended that the sharing of information between the Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and diverse stakeholders active in the conservation of World Heritage properties be undertaken, and that the World Heritage Centre continue the cooperation with the secretariats of other MEAs to enhance synergies and coherence.

B.1. U.N. Information Portal on MEAs

34. The existing MEA Initiative (*InforMEA* at <http://www.informe.org>) brings together MEAs, including the *World Heritage Convention*, and other relevant international instruments to develop harmonized and interoperable information systems for the benefit of all Parties. The Initiative gathers the Conference of Parties decisions.
35. However, as far as World Heritage is concerned, *inforMEA* only brings out adopted decisions, without any information on the context in which they were adopted or relevant background information. One could envisage a number of areas of cooperation with the MEA Initiative through the interchange of data and sharing of links between the two information systems. Users of the Information System would therefore have direct access to decisions or resolutions adopted by other international instruments (such as CBD, CITES, RAMSAR) on a specific site; while users of *inforMEA* would have direct access to all relevant statutory documentation on the site (such as state of conservation reports, mission reports, etc.).

B.2. UNEP/IUCN World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA)

36. *Protectedplanet.net* is the new online face of the WDPA, created to showcase a wealth of information but also give tools to interested citizens to input their knowledge about protected areas directly into the WDPA.
37. Contacts have already taken place between the administrators of the Information System and *protectedplanet.net* in order to exchange data codes and better link both tools. The Information System will soon be able to display some of the *protectedplanet.net* content, such as maps and site boundaries. The synergies between those two information systems could be further enhanced.

B.3. Multiple listing

38. A number of World Heritage properties are also listed by other international programmes or instruments such as Man and Biosphere (MAB) Programme, RAMSAR Convention, Geoparks Network, Council of Europe Cultural Routes programme, European Heritage Label, among others. Some World Heritage properties also have intangible elements recognized by the 2003 UNESCO Convention or protected by the 1954 Hague Convention and its 2nd Protocol (1999), etc.

39. To improve the synergies between international instruments, a comprehensive list of World Heritage properties listed in or protected by at least one other convention or programme should be drawn up. Links could be created between the relevant websites to easily access all information available. For example, RAMSAR-related information on a wetland World Heritage property could therefore be accessed through the site-specific page of the Information System, and the other way-round, the OUV and conservation status of a wetland property could be accessed through links at the RAMSAR webpage of the site (<http://www.ramsar.org>).
40. Another example is the Council of Europe Cultural Routes programme. Out of the 24 Cultural Routes currently recognized, 21 are linked to World Heritage properties. Easy access to information on the state of conservation of those sites is also crucial for the various authorities in charge of the management of such Cultural Routes. (http://www.coe.int/t/dq4/cultureheritage/culture/Routes/Default_en.asp).
41. A special feature of the Information System Advanced Search could be added to allow users to search World Heritage properties which are also listed or protected under another international convention/programme. Likewise a search per theme is already available (e.g. forests, marine heritage, cultural landscapes, etc.), we could propose a search for RAMSAR sites, sites included in the Council of Europe Cultural Routes or sites part of the Geoparks Network.

V. DRAFT DECISION

Draft Decision: 37 COM 7C

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Document WHC-13/37.COM/7C,*
2. *Recalling Decisions **35 COM 7C** and **36 COM 7C**, adopted at its 35th (UNESCO, 2011) and 36th (Saint-Petersburg, 2012) sessions respectively,*
3. *Expresses its appreciation to the Flemish Government for its support in establishing the online "State of Conservation Information System of World Heritage properties";*
4. *Welcomes the contribution of the Information System to the improved transparency of World Heritage Reactive Monitoring and informed decision-making processes;*
5. *Decides that the reports submitted by States Parties on the state of conservation of World Heritage properties should be made public in order to facilitate their consultation by all stakeholders and contribute to an improved transparency of the reactive monitoring process and therefore requests the World Heritage Centre to make them publicly accessible through the State of Conservation Information System;*
6. *Encourages the World Heritage Centre to continue exploring opportunities to link the Information System to other existing relevant databases as part of a wider Information and knowledge management system, in order to improve the synergies between the World Heritage Convention and other international conventions or programmes;*
7. *Calls upon all States Parties to the Convention to support the activities proposed to contribute towards the improvement of the Information System and its access for the international community.*

Description of the main features available in the Information System

Advanced Search	The Information System proposes a comprehensive Advanced Search form, with over 100 options. Users can therefore search for results per region, per State Party, per property, per category of properties (natural, mixed or cultural), per criterion, per year or periods, per theme (e.g. cultural landscapes, earthen architecture, marine sites, etc.) as well as per type of threats and key word. To improve the user-friendliness of this tool, users have the possibility to cumulate as many of these options as needed (e.g. to find all natural properties, in any given region, affected by mining operations, between 1980 and 2010).
Results as a List	Once a specific query has been validated, a new page displaying the results opens. All the state of conservation reports matching the query are shown as a list with a summary of the threats affecting the property. Clicking on the name of the property provides direct access to the detailed report.
Results as a Table	Results can also be displayed in a table form. The columns indicate the name of the property, the State Party, the year of reporting as well as the threats affecting the property and whether the property is on the List of World Heritage in Danger or not. For improved user-friendliness, each column can be sorted in alphabetical/chronological order. Here again, clicking on the name of the property provides direct access to the detailed report.
Statistics	This view details all statistical data relevant to the query made by the user. It displays the percentages of properties, subject to a state of conservation report according to the years, the regions, the categories. It also provides statistics and charts on the number of properties, on any given year, region and/or category, affected by any given threat (according to the standard list of factors). Once again, clicking on the name of the threat provides direct access to the list view of all properties affected by this specific threat.
Detailed view	On any given page of the Information System, the name of the property appears as a hyperlink; clickable to open the detailed view of the state of conservation report. The detailed view gathers all the information available on the state of conservation of a property on the year the report was produced (conservation issues, International Assistance and extrabudgetary funds granted up to the year concerned, missions and mission reports, etc.). A number of direct links to background information are also available on the right-hand side of this page, such as brief description, nomination file, previous state of conservation reports, other relevant documents, etc., to allow users to efficiently navigate through the World Heritage Centre's website.
Excel and Word reports	To facilitate its use and dissemination of information, the Information System includes the possibility to export the results either as Excel spread sheets or Word documents. To be more flexible and target their specific needs, users will shortly be able to choose through a dedicated interface which fields of the database they wish to export.
Charts	Throughout the pages of the Information System, all charts proposed (trend lines, pie charts, column charts, etc.) are interactive. Users can indeed click on the parts of the charts they are interested in to directly access the information. Results pages always start with a graphic visualization of the information, mostly with a column-chart displaying the number of reports per year, and two pie-charts displaying the results per region and per category of properties (Natural, Mixed or Cultural). More in-depth information is available by hovering the mouse over the various parts of the chart. Maps will also shortly be available as a geographical visual representation of data.