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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-ninth session

Bonn, Germany

28 June – 8 July 2015

Item 5 of the Provisional Agenda: Reports of the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies

5C. Follow-up to the Director-General's initiative on "The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead"

SUMMARY

In 2012, the Director-General of UNESCO launched an initiative entitled "The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead" to give an opportunity to the Advisory Bodies, the Secretariat and the States Parties to collectively review the main challenges and opportunities facing the *Convention*.

A half-day meeting was convened by the Director-General on 21 January 2015 to take stock of progress made to improve dialogue, communication and transparency. This meeting was a follow-up to the series of meetings organised since October 2012. The 2012 meeting produced a number of recommendations and the progress of their implementation was reviewed both by the World Heritage Committee and the General Assembly of States Parties.

As per Decision **38 COM 5C**, this document presents a progress report of the main conclusions and actions resulting from the "Thinking Ahead" initiative since its inception.

Draft Decision: 39 COM 5C, See Point III

I. Background

1. The inaugural “Thinking Ahead” meeting was convened by the Director-General of UNESCO from 2 to 3 October 2012, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the *World Heritage Convention*. The meeting was initiated to give all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the *World Heritage Convention* – the Advisory Bodies, Secretariat and States Parties – a platform to collectively review the main challenges facing the *Convention* and explore new opportunities to improve dialogue, communication and transparency in all processes of the *Convention*. A detailed summary of this meeting, including the major conclusions of the debate can be found at the following webpage: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/thinkingahead/>
2. The summary of the “Thinking Ahead” meeting in October 2012, along with plans for further actions to be undertaken, were presented to the 37th session of the World Heritage Committee (Phnom Penh, 2013) and subsequently to the 19th General Assembly of States Parties to the *World Heritage Convention* in November 2013. The General Assembly adopted Resolution **19 GA 11**, which encouraged all parties concerned to continue contributing to the process of enhancing the credibility of the *Convention*.
3. A plan and report on the actions taken and progress achieved to implement the recommendations was presented at the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee (Doha, 2014). The 38th session noted the positive impact of initiatives already undertaken, plans for further action and invited all stakeholders to pursue efforts to enhance and facilitate dialogue, communication and transparency in all processes of the *Convention*, as well as to address funding implications. The 19th General Assembly of States Parties (Paris, 2013) and the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee (Doha, 2014), by Resolution **19 GA 11** and Decision **38 COM 5C** respectively, requested for a progress report on the implementation of recommendations to be presented at the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee (Bonn, 2015).
4. As a follow-up to the “Thinking Ahead” initiative, the Director-General convened a half-day meeting on 21 January 2015. This meeting sought to take stock of the reform of the *Convention’s* processes that have taken place thus far and to acknowledge the positive progress made by all stakeholders. A detailed summary of this meeting can be found at the following webpage: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/thinkingahead/>. The Chairperson of the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee, Prof. Maria Böhmer, Minister of State in the German Federal Foreign Office, also had the opportunity to share the recommendations arising from the *ad hoc working group* established by the 38th session of the Committee to examine issues and formulate recommendations on the evaluation and nomination process (Decision **38 COM 13**).
5. Accordingly, the present document sets out the main conclusions, progress and actions from the “Thinking Ahead” discussions to date, and updates the plans already outlined for further action. It follows the main subject headings of reports already presented to the World Heritage Committee and General Assembly of States Parties. It is to be noted that some of the outcomes of the “Thinking Ahead” initiative are also addressed in other agenda items that relate to the Recommendations of the Evaluation of the Global Strategy (Document WHC-15/39.COM/5E), Progress report on the upstream processes (Document WHC-15/39.COM/9A), the Revision of the *Operational Guidelines* (Document WHC-15/39.COM/11) and the Report of the *ad hoc working group* (Document WHC-15/39.COM/13A).

II. Main Conclusions of the “Thinking Ahead” Initiative and Updates on Follow-up Actions

Tentative Lists and Nominations

6. The process of developing Tentative Lists and nominations is an area where States Parties agreed should benefit from greater dialogue, transparency and cooperation. Despite resource constraints, the Advisory Bodies have made considerable efforts to improve communication and cooperation with States Parties throughout the nomination process.
7. The first meeting of the “Thinking Ahead” initiative recommended that Tentative Lists should be developed through a rigorous screening process, which ensures that only sites with the potential to fulfil requirements for Outstanding Universal Value and contribute to filling gaps on the World Heritage List are added to the Tentative List. The major concern expressed by States Parties was that sites placed on the Tentative List may lead to the expectation within their countries that the site would be inscribed in the near future. In response to States Parties’ requests for guidance in this matter, the Advisory Bodies have affirmed their readiness to avail themselves for early consultation on the feasibility of properties for nomination.
8. The “Upstream Process”, launched by the Committee in 2010 and 2011, aims to provide States Parties with assistance by the Advisory Bodies and Secretariat at the early stages of the nomination process, where guidance, mentoring and capacity-building support is provided throughout the process of preparing the nomination dossier. The “Upstream Process” has already resulted in the presentation of successful nominations for inscription on the World Heritage List, such as Namibia’s inscription of the Namib Sand Sea. In addition, two nominations that were a part of this initiative, Rock Drawings in the Hail Region (Saudi Arabia), and Fray Bentos Cultural-Industrial Landscape (Uruguay), will be examined by the Committee at the current session. The Upstream initiative has now extended beyond the initial pilot phase, and is available at the request of individual States Parties.
9. Since the first “Thinking Ahead” meeting, the *Operational Guidelines* have been revised to include the carrying out of initial preparatory work, as reflected in paragraph 122. The integration of provisions in the *Operational Guidelines* to incorporate the “Upstream Process” into the nomination process such that it is uniformly applicable to all countries requiring such assistance is included in the Revision of the *Operational Guidelines* document to be examined by the 39th session of the Committee (Document WHC-15/39.COM/11).
10. Furthermore, publications such as the *Resource Manual on Preparing World Heritage Nominations*, various guides to managing World Heritage Sites and Thematic Studies on cultural and natural heritage, including identifying gaps, are being translated into more languages and continue to provide guidance to States Parties and inform their choices on sites to submit for nomination.
11. The growing number of “upstream” advisory missions on specific nominations has contributed to the resolution of issues before the submission of nominations or the evaluation outcome. States Parties may initiate “upstream” advisory missions on a voluntary basis. However, such “upstream” missions are nonetheless constrained by the availability of funding from some States Parties to pay for advisory services requested from the Advisory Bodies. Improving the access of States Parties to such advisory services would thus require the mobilization of extra-budgetary resources, including an allocation from the World Heritage Fund.

12. At the “Thinking Ahead” meeting convened in January 2015, States Parties have welcomed new reforms already introduced by ICOMOS to introduce greater transparency and dialogue in the nomination and evaluation process. The reforms are as follows: (i) ICOMOS has published the names of experts on the World Heritage Panel for nominations that are being considered for inscription at the 39th session of the Committee; (ii) ICOMOS has initiated meetings with States Parties on their nominations following the first World Heritage Panel in December. These meetings provide experts from States Parties a first-hand chance to hear directly from ICOMOS on issues concerning their nominations. At the same time, experts from States Parties are able to address ICOMOS’s queries and present their viewpoint as well. While not all States Parties may be in the financial position to fly their experts into Paris for face-to-face dialogue, States Parties can also consider other feasible and less cost-intensive options like leveraging on technology such as video-conferencing and Skype for these meetings to take place; (iii) As part of the evaluation process, ICOMOS will invite States Parties to present their case before the World Heritage Panel in the December of the year preceding the Committee Session at which their nominations will be discussed and; (iv) ICOMOS will also ensure stronger diversity among their experts available for evaluations and on the World Heritage Panel in terms of relevant expertise and knowledge of the local culture, region and geopolitical situation.
13. One recommendation arising from the *ad hoc working group* is for new nominations from States Parties that are Committee members to not be examined during their mandate. It is to be noted that this recommendation was part of the independent evaluation by UNESCO’s external auditor (Recommendation 12) (Document WHC-11/35.COM/INF.9A). This recommendation was examined by the 19th General Assembly of States Parties (Paris, 2013) and subsequently at the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee (Doha, 2014), where by its Decision **38 COM 9C**, decided that the outcomes of the discussions on Recommendations 12¹ and 20² will be reported to the 20th General Assembly of States Parties in November 2015. It was also decided to establish an *ad hoc working group* that will meet during the 39th session to discuss Recommendation 20.
14. While some States Parties were supportive of the proposal by the *ad hoc working group* to implement Recommendation 12, others expressed concerns that the recommendation may have the effect of putting States Parties in the difficult position of choosing between serving as a Committee member or surfacing new nominations if they are to voluntarily refrain from surfacing new nominations during their mandate. Possible compromises proposed include having a concession made for States Parties with fewer properties on the List (i.e. States Parties with less than 3, properties on the List, instead of 5 as proposed by the *ad hoc working group*).

¹ **Recommendation 12** calls for the revision of the *Rules of Procedure* of the Committee for a better application of the *Convention*:

- Prohibit a State Party from submitting a nomination file during its term of office (or at least postpone its examination by the Committee while the State is present);
- Prohibit the practice of the presentation of amendments to decision proposals signed by a series of delegations, before the opening of the debate on the nomination of the site;
- Ensure the effective transparency of the procedure for the publicity of debates;
- Prohibit nominations that do not fulfil the conditions laid down in the *Operational Guidelines*.

² **Recommendation 20** calls for a revision to the *Rules of Procedure* to forbid a State Party represented on the Committee to take part in the decision on follow-up given to state of conservation reports concerning a property situated on its territory.

15. To allow for effective and quality dialogue to take place between the Advisory Bodies and States Parties, the “Thinking Ahead” meetings have also discussed the reconsideration of the timeline for the nomination process. Proposals were made to split the World Heritage Committee meeting into a two-year cycle such that the first session (year 1) focuses on conservation issues and the second session (year 2) on new nominations, or having the Committee session take place once every two years instead of annually. The recommendations related to the extension of the timeline for the nominations process and those referred to in paragraphs 13 and 14 above are further elaborated in the report from the *ad hoc working group* (Document WHC-15/39.COM/13A).

Conservation of Properties

16. The “Thinking Ahead” discussions have reiterated the crucial need to place greater emphasis on conservation issues, vis-à-vis new nominations, and this has been duly reflected through a number of new initiatives and mechanisms, also enhancing the level of dialogue and transparency between States Parties and Advisory Bodies.
17. One key measure undertaken to improve transparency is the State of Conservation (SOC) Information System: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc/> established on the World Heritage Centre website. The SOC Information System contains all relevant information related to the State of Conservation of 500 World Heritage properties so far through 3006 reports, including reactive monitoring mission reports, Committee decisions, national and global statistics as well as guidance tools to help improve the heritage conservation process. Since 2014, the SOC Information System also displays SOC reports received from States Parties concerned, with the prior consent of States Parties. As of March 2015, over 80 percent of SOC reports received from States Parties have been uploaded on the World Heritage Centre website for public access; for the remainder, a summary is available online.
18. In addition, in accordance with paragraph 174 of the *Operational Guidelines*, an established fact-checking process has been put in place for the Secretariat to verify any information they may receive from third parties regarding the state of conservation of a property inscribed. This process is intended to prevent conflicting points of view from being reflected in the State of Conservation report.
19. Furthermore, the establishment of a new statutory deadline (i.e. 1 December of the year preceding the examination of the property) for States Parties to submit their SOC reports to the World Heritage Centre will allow more time for constructive dialogue and exchange on conservation challenges facing the property to take place between the States Parties concerned, the Advisory Bodies and the Secretariat (Decision **38 COM 7**). The new statutory deadline has also been included in the Revision of the *Operational Guidelines* document (Document WHC-15/39.COM/11).
20. As with the case of Tentative Lists and Nominations, there have been a growing number of advisory missions aimed at addressing threats to properties at an earlier stage and providing direct technical support to States Parties. While this has resulted in positive dialogue and cooperation in terms of the monitoring processes of the *Convention*, sustaining this approach is again contingent on the availability of adequate financial and human resources. The recent creation of a special budget line in the World Heritage Fund to provide for these advisory missions will facilitate the organization of such advisory missions, but the budgetary provision currently available is limited.

21. Regarding the List of World Heritage in Danger, in line with the need for more dialogue and transparency and in accordance with the *Operational Guidelines*, prior consultation always takes place with the State Party concerned before proposing inscription of any property on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Modalities to use international cooperation for ensuring the early removal of properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger still needs to be further explored and better harnessed.
22. In light of resource constraints, States Parties have also requested that new resources should be channelled towards conservation efforts, especially to help properties that are inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, or those under threat of danger listing. The *ad hoc working group* has also examined the disproportionate channelling of funds for evaluating new nominations vis-à-vis monitoring the state of conservation of properties currently inscribed, and have put forth proposals to optimize funding for greater sustainability and to prioritize conservation, which is at the heart of the *Convention* (Document WHC-15/39.COM/13A).
23. The “Thinking Ahead” meetings have also considered the importance of separating threats from development and neglect of management from other threats and to find practical solutions to reconcile conservation principles with social and economic development. In furtherance of this objective, the Advisory Bodies have developed and conducted training courses to equip States Parties with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) methodologies, with a special focus on the impact on Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). The use of EIAs and HIAs will continue to be encouraged in a sustained manner, with these documents translated into different languages, so that as many States Parties as possible are able to benefit from this guidance.

Capacity-building

24. Continued reinforcement of the capacity-building pillar of the *Convention* will remain a priority to enable States Parties to develop the relevant expertise to protect and manage their sites, as well as to ensure that the World Heritage List remains representative, credible and balanced.
25. Since the World Heritage Capacity-Building Strategy was adopted by the Committee at its 35th Session (Paris, 2011) (Decision **35 COM 9B**), ICCROM, in collaboration with ICOMOS, IUCN and the World Heritage Centre, has been working with UNESCO category 2 centres related to World Heritage and other institutional partners to implement capacity-building activities (see also Document WHC-15/39.COM/6). These initiatives are developed at both regional and national levels to address the needs of heritage practitioners, institutions (decision and policy makers) and other networks and communities (i.e. civil society at large).
26. Responding to the need expressed by representatives of States Parties, training for Committee members is taking place through information and orientation sessions that provide an overview of Outstanding Universal Value, procedural issues, the nomination process and State of Conservation. For future orientation sessions, States Parties have collectively proposed that the Secretariat and Advisory Bodies address complex issues pertaining to the implementation of the *Convention*, such as the nomination of mixed and serial sites, procedural issues (e.g. how amendments should be proposed at Committee sessions), the preparation of Tentative Lists and moving towards a more representative World Heritage List. States Parties also requested to have more case studies and best practices that illustrate how the *Operational Guidelines* have been applied to actual sites. These topics will be duly considered by the Secretariat and Advisory Bodies for incorporation in future orientation sessions. The first orientation

session takes place immediately following the election of new members by the General Assembly of States Parties. An additional orientation session is organized in January, followed by another one in May, in conjunction with an information session on the forthcoming session of the Committee for all States Parties and finally, on the day preceding the opening of the annual World Heritage Committee session.

27. In addition, the Advisory Bodies and Secretariat will continue to disseminate and share best practices manuals for heritage preservation, in particular those that successfully illustrate the relationship between conservation and sustainable development, through online platforms and publications. The Secretariat has also initiated the preparation of a feasibility study for the development of a Policy Guidelines as requested by the World Heritage Committee (Document WHC-15/39.COM/12).

Roles of Advisory Bodies and Secretariat

28. With a view to enhance communication between the Advisory Bodies and Secretariat, and to further clarify their respective roles and responsibilities, formal coordination meetings are held at least twice a year and several informal interactions take place throughout the year.
29. Acknowledging feedback from States Parties on the importance of having more diversity in the Advisory Bodies' network of experts, the Advisory Bodies have committed to undertake measures that ensure diversity among their resource persons for reactive monitoring and evaluation of nominations in terms of having a balanced geographical representation (in-depth knowledge of the regional and geopolitical situation for a better awareness of political sensitivities), relevant expertise (especially for mixed and natural sites) and the inclusion of representatives from civil society (e.g. NGOs and universities).
30. The report of the *ad hoc working group* (Document WHC-15/39.COM/13A) also contains several recommendations related to the working methods of the Advisory Bodies.

Role of the Committee and Governance

31. Concerns expressed by States Parties on the growing discrepancy between expert advice and decisions of the World Heritage Committee are being addressed through the ongoing dialogue, communication and transparency process.
32. A major change was recently adopted by the 1st Extraordinary Session of the General Assembly of States Parties (Paris, 2014) to respond to the need for more equitable geographic representation in the World Heritage Committee. Elections of Committee Members will now be conducted on the basis of the composition of the electoral groups of UNESCO (Resolution **1 EXT.GA 3**), comprising 16 fixed seats for elections allocated among the electoral groups and the remaining 5 seats left for an open election. It was decided that seats shall be allocated for each electoral group as follows:
 - i) 2 seats for Group I (Western European and North American States)
 - ii) 2 seats for Group II (Eastern European States)
 - iii) 2 seats for Group III (Latin-American and Caribbean States)
 - iv) 3 seats for Group IV (Asian and the Pacific States)
 - v) 4 seats for Group V(a) (African States)
 - vi) 2 seats for Group V(b) (Arab States)

- vii) An additional seat shall be allocated for Group III and Group IV on a rotational basis. Due consideration will also be given to the election of at least one State Party who has never served as a Member of the World Heritage Committee.

For further details on the decision, please refer to the Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly of States Parties at its 1st Extraordinary Session, available at: <http://whc.unesco.org/archive/2014/whc14-1EXTGA-4-en.pdf>.

Resource Constraints

33. As pointed out above, many of the activities aimed at enhancing the credibility of the *Convention* and improving the effectiveness of current practices would require the Advisory Bodies and Secretariat to engage more intensively with State Parties and hence have considerable financial implications. As the *Convention* reaches universality, the growing number of sites on the list and threats to existing sites makes it more challenging to meet new demands and maintain a high quality of work in the absence of additional resources.
34. In particular, it is important that necessary financial resources are available to ensure that existing programs of the *Convention* are not hampered by the lack of funds and that new and existing initiatives can continue sustainably, such as advisory missions in the framework of monitoring and nomination processes, funding International Assistance projects – particularly capacity-building work for Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDs) – and addressing conservation issues at specific sites, especially for sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger or those under threat of danger listing.
35. In terms of resource mobilization, a resolution was adopted at the 19th General Assembly of States Parties in 2013 (Resolution **19 GA 8**) recommending that States Parties make voluntary contributions to the World Heritage Fund. By the same Resolution, a sub-account was created within the World Heritage Fund to be used exclusively to enhance the human resource capacities of the Secretariat, inviting States Parties to provide voluntary supplementary contributions to this sub-account totalling at least US\$ 1,000,000 per year. However, contributions to this sub-account have been limited so far, coming only from three States Parties, amounting to US\$ 42,097 as of 21 January 2015.
36. While some States Parties have made voluntary contributions to increase the resources of the World Heritage Fund, other States Parties have contributed directly by supporting various activities of the World Heritage Centre. At the same time, efforts at resource mobilization cannot be solely dependent on the appeal for States Parties to increase their contributions to the Fund; new and innovative ways to boost resources should be explored as well.
37. The *ad hoc working group* has also made some recommendations in this regard in Document WHC-15/39.COM/13A.

III. DRAFT DECISION

Draft Decision: 39 COM 5C

The World Heritage Committee,

1. *Having examined Document WHC-15/39.COM/5C,*
2. *Recalling Decisions **33 COM 5A, 34 COM 5C, 35 COM 5D, 36 COM 12B, 37 COM 5C, 38 COM 5C** adopted at its 33rd (Seville, 2009), 34th (Brasilia, 2010), 35th (UNESCO, 2011), 36th (Saint-Petersburg, 2012), 37th (Phnom Penh, 2013) and 38th (Doha, 2014) sessions respectively;*
3. *Thanks the Director-General for convening the follow-up meeting on “The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead” (UNESCO HQs, 21 January 2015);*
4. *Acknowledges the positive impact of actions already taken, as well as plans for further actions;*
5. *Encourages all stakeholders to continue to pursue efforts to enhance and facilitate dialogue, communication and transparency in all processes of the Convention and in the framework of the Director-General’s initiative, “The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead”, as well as to address funding implications, within their respective mandates and competence, as appropriate.*