

**Summary of the “The World Heritage Convention: Thinking Ahead” meeting between the Director-General of UNESCO, the Chairperson of the 39th Session of the World Heritage Committee, States Parties to the World Heritage Convention and the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee**

**21 January 2015, 2.30pm – 5.30pm**

**UNESCO HQ, Room II, Paris**

## **Background**

The “Thinking Ahead” initiative is intended to improve dialogue, communication and transparency among all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, with the objective of enhancing the credibility of 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.

The January 2015 meeting was convened as a follow-up to the meeting that was held from 2 to 3 October 2012 on the occasion of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the World Heritage Convention. The 2012 meeting produced a number of recommendations that were eventually submitted to the 37th session (Phnom Penh, 2013) and 38th session (Doha, 2014) of the Committee for review of their state of implementation. The progress was also reviewed at the 19th General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention in November 2013, when the Director-General convened another exchange session. 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*.

The present “Thinking Ahead” meeting was mainly devoted to the presentation by the Chairperson of the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee, Prof. Maria Böhmer, Minister of State in the German Federal Foreign Office (thereafter, “the Chairperson”) on the ongoing work of the *ad hoc working group*, established by the 38th session to examine issues related to the working methods of the evaluation and decision-making process of nominations and formulate recommendations (Decision **38 COM 13**). The *ad hoc working group* inter alia, called upon the Advisory Bodies to consult and have dialogue with all States Parties concerned. The meeting also gave the Heads of the Advisory Bodies the opportunity to report on the ongoing changes and initiatives in view of their contributions to the objectives of the “Thinking Ahead” initiative.

## **Introduction**

In the presence of the Advisory Bodies, States Parties and the Chairperson, the Director-General opened the meeting by commending the positive actions and co-operation undertaken by all parties to improve dialogue, communication and transparency, since the start of the “Thinking Ahead” initiative in 2012. She affirmed that with all stakeholders committed to upholding the spirit of the *Convention*, the *Convention* would become stronger.

### **A. Report on the ongoing work of the *ad hoc working group***

The Chairperson thanked the Director-General for convening the meeting and said that it was a great privilege and honour for Germany to host the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee in Bonn. She shared the preliminary recommendations that had emerged from the *ad hoc working group*'s discussions so far, which would be further refined and finalized in the coming months.

i) Working Methods of the Advisory Bodies

The *ad hoc working group* had decided to concentrate its recommendations on ICOMOS, as cultural sites generate the highest volume of work. The recommendations related to the role of the Advisory Bodies are as follows:

- For Advisory Bodies to begin the process of dialogue with States Parties on their nominations as early as possible;
- For information exchanges between Advisory Bodies and States Parties to take place not only in writing, but in direct dialogue and conversations;
- To give States Parties the opportunity to present their case before the World Heritage Panel in December, preceding the year of the Committee session where their nomination will be discussed;
- For Advisory Bodies to submit an interim report in January (i.e. between the two Panel meetings in December and March) to show the nominations that have the best prospects for inscription;
- To send, as soon as possible, the evaluation reports of Advisory Bodies on nominations to the national experts of States Parties concerned;
- To publish the names of all experts evaluating the sites nominated for inscription;
- To officially inform the World Heritage Committee of the members of the World Heritage Panel and their qualifications in advance (Prof. Böhmer noted that this was already an ongoing practice by ICOMOS);
- To admit a representative of the Chair of the Committee session to all World Heritage Panel meetings, and for records of Panel meetings to be made available to the World Heritage Centre and all States Parties;
- To limit the term of all Committee members to two years;
- To include institutions such as universities and other civil society organizations in the evaluation procedure;
- To provide the financial implication of each evaluation to ensure accountability before the World Heritage Committee.

The Chairperson welcomed the fact that ICOMOS had already introduced reforms and was open to continue supporting proposed new methods. She proceeded to inform the meeting of further recommendations addressed specifically to ICOMOS:

- To ensure representation of all geographical regions and all relevant scientific disciplines on the World Heritage Panel;
- To include ICCROM in the evaluation of nominations, especially on-site visits for State of Conservation missions.

ii) Working Methods of the World Heritage Committee

A number of recommendations were also made relating to the *Operational Guidelines* and *Rules of Procedure*:

- For new nominations from States Parties who are Committee members not to be examined during their mandate. This criteria shall not apply to States Parties with less than five sites on the List;
- After the completeness check of nomination dossiers by the Secretariat, Committee members should have access to all working documents as early as possible;
- For the terms “referral”, “deferral”, and “not to inscribe” to be more clearly defined.

iii) Finances

It was recalled that only two States Parties, **Finland** and **Germany**, were members of this sub-group. The recommendations arising from the sub-group on Finances are as follows:

- To determine if the current funding allocation of the World Heritage Fund is optimized. Currently, 80% of the Fund is spent on the evaluation of new nominations while the remaining 20% is dedicated to the monitoring of the state of conservation of properties currently inscribed, including the List of World Heritage in Danger;
- To consider if cost-savings can be achieved by reducing the frequency of Committee meetings and lightening the agenda discussed at each meeting, which would in turn alleviate the workload burden of the Secretariat and Advisory Bodies;
- To analyze the costs incurred by the different Advisory Bodies, taking into account the rising cost of living and that the Advisory Bodies already subsidize the cost of each advisory mission;
- To ensure that the usage of additional potential funds is clearly defined;
- To analyze the number of new nominations that can be feasibly carried out within the current budget.

The Chairperson also acknowledged the growing complexity of nominations and political dynamics, but expressed hope that the *ad hoc working group*, in consultation with the Advisory Bodies and States Parties, would continue to work towards ensuring that the recommendations are met with broad-based approval.

**B. Presentation by the Advisory Bodies on their Contributions to the “Thinking Ahead” Initiative**

The Heads of the Advisory Bodies and/or their representatives in turn thanked the Director-General for her support of the “Thinking Ahead” initiative and provided an overview of the new initiatives they had introduced in support of the “Thinking Ahead” initiative since 2012.

Mr. Gustavo Araoz, President of ICOMOS

The President of ICOMOS shared that on 20 January 2015, ICOMOS had invited Committee members to hear about the new reforms they had introduced as well as others to be adopted for the next cycle. He summarized the main initiatives devised to open up more channels for dialogue with States Parties: (i) initiate meetings with States Parties on their nominations; (ii) early advice to States Parties concerned on the recommendation of “non-inscription” on their nomination; (iii) as part of the evaluation process, invite States Parties to present their case before the World Heritage Panel in December of the year preceding the Committee meeting at which their nominations will be discussed; and in efforts to enhance transparency, (iv) publish the names of the experts on the World Heritage Panel. In March 2015, ICOMOS also intends to invite delegations with nominations to be discussed at the 39th session for a briefing session on how the interaction with the ICOMOS evaluation panel will take place. This briefing session would help to better prepare States Parties for the upcoming Panel and the Committee meeting, and give them the opportunity to engage and dialogue directly with ICOMOS.

Mr. Stefano De Caro, Director-General of ICCROM

The Director-General of ICCROM reiterated ICCROM’s continued support for the capacity-building pillar of the *World Heritage Convention*. He recalled ICCROM’s contributions in fulfilling the objectives of the “Thinking Ahead” initiative by working with various partners and

category 2 centres on the following initiatives: (i) the launch of the World Heritage Capacity-Building Programme; (ii) organizing workshops on Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) and Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) to better equip States Parties to protect and manage their World Heritage Sites; and (iii) working to translate the World Heritage Manual Series into English, French and Spanish to facilitate access by more States Parties. The Director-General of ICCROM also shared that ICCROM was working with the World Heritage Centre and other Advisory Bodies to make orientation sessions for Committee members more meaningful.

Mr. Tim Badman, Director of IUCN's World Heritage Programme and representative of the Director-General of IUCN

The Director of IUCN's World Heritage Programme reaffirmed commitment to World Heritage from IUCN's newly appointed Director-General, Mme. Inger Anderson. He noted that IUCN has extended its support to the *Convention* following a recent evaluation of the IUCN World Heritage Programme, which had already been presented at the 38th session of the World Heritage Committee. The review found unsustainable stress in the World Heritage system, findings which predate the recent budget cuts. He recalled the success of the World Parks Congress that IUCN had organized (Sydney, November 2014) which attracted 6000 delegates from over 170 countries. World Heritage was one of the key themes of the Congress, which also included a keynote address by the Director-General of UNESCO. IUCN has released the World Heritage Outlook – the first global assessment of all natural World Heritage sites – which showed that 63% of the 228 natural sites had a good status, while 37% were still facing concerns and critical threats. IUCN also conducted the first global assessment of the benefits that World Heritage sites provide. He noted that the conclusions of the Congress indicated that the future of the *Convention* shows much promise, there were also key challenges, and emphasized the need: (i) for greater support for properties on the List of World Heritage in Danger; (ii) to overcome the perceived politicization of the World Heritage Committee; and (iii) to address how the *Convention* currently lags behind international norms related to the rights of indigenous peoples and communities, and the need for more civil society involvement. He noted that IUCN had introduced a progressive series of reforms to ensure both the transparency of their advice and to maximize dialogue possibilities in the evaluation process. On the need to reform timelines, he recalled IUCN's proposal that the Committee could meet every two years instead of annually to alleviate the workload burden that it faces and to allow more time for dialogue and conservation action with listed sites. Finally, the Director of IUCN's World Heritage Programme also welcomed the establishment of the *ad hoc working group* and affirmed IUCN's continued involvement in the reform of the *Convention* to ensure its place in the centre of global conservation efforts.

### **C. Summary of the Debate**

Thereafter, the floor was opened to States Parties for dialogue and discussion. All participants expressed their gratitude for the Director-General's initiative in convening the "Thinking Ahead" meeting that brings multiple stakeholders together for dialogue and consensus building, and acknowledged the reforms and positive progress made in the past few years despite resource constraints. The fruitful discussion that took place can be summarized according to the following themes:

- i) Tentative Lists and Nominations
  - On Tentative Lists, the Delegation of **Canada** raised concerns that when a site is placed on the list, it leads to political pressure within the country that the site would be inscribed in the near future. The Delegation of **Canada** hence requested for guidance to be given to States Parties to manage the political pressure. In response, the President of ICOMOS reiterated the importance of the "upstream process" and said that ICOMOS was

available for early consultation on the feasibility of properties for nomination.

- One recommendation arising from the *ad hoc working group* is for new nominations from States Parties who are Committee members to not be examined during their mandate. It is to be noted that this recommendation is part of the independent evaluation by UNESCO's external auditor (Recommendation 12). This recommendation was examined by the 19th General Assembly of States Parties (Paris, 2013) and subsequently at 38th session (Doha, 2014), where by its Decision **38 COM 9C**, decided that the outcomes of the discussions on recommendations 12 and 20 will be reported to the 20th session of the General Assembly in 2015. It was also decided to establish an *ad hoc working group* that will meet during the 39th session to discuss Recommendation 20 (Note: Recommendation 20 calls for a revision of the *Rules of Procedure* to forbid a State Party, serving on the Committee, from taking part in the decision on follow-up given to state of conservation reports concerning a property situated on its territory and participate in debates on State of Conservation reports of a property situated in its territory).
- Some States Parties (the Delegation of **Finland**, the Delegation of **Sweden**) were supportive of the proposal by the *ad hoc working group* to implement Recommendation 12, but others (the Delegation of **Japan**, the Delegation of **Lebanon**, the Delegation of **Peru**) 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.
- One possible compromise, proposed by the Delegation of **Lebanon**, should be to have a concession made for States Parties with fewer properties (i.e. less than 3) on the list to still be able to put forth new nominations during their mandate as Committee members. In this way, States Parties who are currently underrepresented on the list would not be discouraged from proposing new nominations during their mandate.
- The Delegation of **Mexico** recalled the persistent anomalies regarding the evaluation process for new inscriptions on the World Heritage List, and emphasized the need for the Advisory Bodies to work in a fully transparent manner as divergence between the evaluation and recommendations by Advisory Bodies, and the eventual decision taken by the Committee, may have a negative impact on the credibility of the *Convention*.
- On extending the timeline for the nominations process, States Parties (the Delegation of **Australia**, the Delegation of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands** and the Delegation of **Norway**) agreed that this was important and could be achieved either by splitting 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 by simply just having the Committee meeting take place once every two years, as suggested by the Director of IUCN's World Heritage Programme in his remarks.
- The proposals to reduce the frequency of meetings and lighten the agenda discussed at each meeting were viewed favourably by all participants, as both a possible cost-saving measure and a way to leave more time for dialogue, which is crucial in improving the transparency of current processes.

ii) Conservation of Properties

- States Parties (the Delegation of **Canada**, the Delegation of **Finland**, the Delegation of **Norway** and the Delegation of the **Republic of the Philippines**) clearly expressed the need to devote more efforts and resources to balance conservation and nominations. States Parties collectively agreed that conservation is at the heart of the *Convention*, and that there is a need to restore conservation as a priority. Therefore, if new resources are forthcoming, it was proposed that they should be channeled towards conservation rather than new nominations.

iii) Capacity-building

- The reinforcement of the capacity-building pillar of the *Convention* will remain a priority to equip States Parties with the relevant expertise to protect and manage their sites, as well as to ensure that the World Heritage List remains representative, credible and balanced.
- States Parties commended the progress of the World Heritage Capacity-Building Strategy and other ongoing initiatives that strengthen capacity-building at the national and regional levels.
- States Parties also requested for more case studies and best practices that illustrate how the *Operational Guidelines* have been applied to actual sites. States Parties also requested that future Orientation sessions for Committee members, which are also open to all States Parties, address more complex issues relating to the implementation of the *Convention*, such as the nomination of mixed and serial sites and moving towards a more representative World Heritage List.

iv) Roles of the Advisory Bodies and Secretariat

- States Parties welcomed ICOMOS's efforts in introducing new reforms to improve dialogue and transparency despite resource constraints faced.
- The Delegation of **India** shared how ICOMOS had invited their national experts for dialogue on their nomination for the 39th session of the Committee. The meeting was mutually useful for India's experts to have a better sense of ICOMOS's queries, and have a platform to explain and present their viewpoint to ICOMOS as well. The Delegation encouraged more of such dialogue to take place – even if States Parties are unable to fly their experts to Paris for face-to-face dialogue, modern technology (such as teleconferencing or Skype) could be used.
- On the World Heritage Panel evaluation process, States Parties (the Delegation of **Finland**, the Delegation of **Lebanon**, the Delegation of **Mexico**, the Delegation of **Palestine** and the Delegation of **Peru**) underscored the importance of Advisory Bodies having more diversity in their experts available for evaluation and in their Panel composition in terms of relevant expertise (especially for mixed and natural sites), knowledge of the regional and geopolitical situation and the inclusion of representatives from civil society (e.g. NGOs and universities).
- To the request by some States Parties (the Delegation of **Colombia**, the Delegation of **Honduras** and the Delegation of **India**) for new reforms to be institutionalized in the *Operational Guidelines*, the President of ICOMOS responded that it would be best to allow some time to assess the impact of these changes and how effective they are, before deciding to institutionalize them.

- v) Roles of the Committee and Governance
- States Parties (the Delegation of **Lebanon**, the Delegation of **Yemen**) also spoke of the need to curb the worrying trend of politicization, and commended the recommendations from the *ad hoc working group* in helping to maintain the credibility of the *Convention*.
  - The meeting also recalled the importance of the decision adopted at the 1st Extraordinary Session of the General Assembly of States Parties in November 2014, which would ensure more equitable geographic representation in the World Heritage Committee (Resolution **1 EXT.GA 3**) and were eager to see the outcomes of this decision.
- vi) Resource Constraints
- States Parties (the Delegation of **Australia**, the delegation of **Croatia**, the Delegation of **Finland**, the Delegation of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands**, the Delegation of the **Republic of the Philippines**, the Delegation of **Sweden**, and the Delegation of **Turkey**) acknowledged the increasing workload that the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies were facing. As the *Convention* reaches universality, the growing number of sites and rising threats to existing sites would make it more challenging to meet new demands and maintain the same quality of work in the absence of additional resources.
  - The meeting commended the Advisory Bodies for making considerable efforts at improving dialogue and transparency, but acknowledged that these reforms would only be viable and sustainable if there were more resources available.
  - In particular, the *Convention's* programmes directly hampered by the lack of funds are: (a) International Assistance projects, especially capacity-building work for Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and; (b) conservation efforts, for sites on the List of World Heritage in Danger, or those under threat of danger listing.
  - States Parties (the Delegation of **Australia**, the Delegation of **Finland**) also called on other States Parties to increase their contributions to the World Heritage Fund, in particular to the sub-account created to be used exclusively to enhance the human capacities of the Secretariat (Resolution **19 GA 8**). Director/WHC commended **Australia** for doubling their contribution to the World Heritage Fund.
  - To the point on mobilizing more voluntary contributions, the Chairperson highlighted **Australia** as a model and further encouraged this effort, but also said that it was important to reflect on new and innovative ways to boost resources as well.

#### **D. Conclusions and Next Steps**

The Chairperson reiterated her gratitude to the Advisory Bodies and Secretariat for their willingness to implement reforms and new initiatives despite resource constraints, and thanked States Parties for their positive reactions and contribution to an open and constructive dialogue. She assured all participants that the recommendations of the *ad hoc working group* would be circulated to all States Parties with ample time for them to reflect and respond before the 39th session of the Committee. In the lead up to the 39th session of the Committee, consultations with Advisory Bodies and States Parties will continue to ensure that all views are heard and taken into consideration.

In his closing remarks, the Assistant Director-General for Culture of UNESCO emphasized the importance of safeguarding *the World Heritage Convention* and said that he was encouraged to see all stakeholders – the Secretariat, the Advisory Bodies and States Parties – committed to work together and assume shared responsibility to improve dialogue, communication and transparency. He also emphasized the importance of augmenting staff and financial resources to support the work of the World Heritage Committee in order to have a significant impact on the aims of the *Convention*, and called on States Parties to find a solution to this problem.