
León Cathedral (Nicaragua) No 1236

Official name as proposed by the State Party

León Cathedral

Location

León, Nicaragua

Brief description

León Cathedral was constructed between 1747 and the early 19th century. It is 105,83 m long by 57,13 m wide. The project was conceived by the Guatemalan architect Diego José de Porres Esquivel on the basis of a rectangular layout, used for Latin American Cathedrals from the 16th century. Architectural features and proportions respond to trends that originated in Antigua Guatemala that reach in León their most significant expression. From a stylistic point of view, the monument shows the transition from Baroque to Neo-classic and is characterized by the sobriety of its decoration. The Cathedral contains important movable works of art.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *monument*.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

16 June 1995

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

None

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

22 September 2006

26 February 2010

Background

This is a referred back nomination (32 COM, Quebec City, 2008).

A first nomination dossier for León Cathedral was examined by the World Heritage Committee at its 32nd Session (Quebec City, 2008). At the time, ICOMOS recommended to refer back the nomination to the State Party.

The World Heritage Committee adopted the following decision (32 COM 8B.45):

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Documents WHC-08/32.COM/8B and WHC-08/32.COM/INF.8B1,

2. Refers the nomination of the León Cathedral, Nicaragua, back to the State Party to allow it to:

- a) complete the planning and implementation schedule for the restoration and conservation of the monument;
- b) complete, approve and implement the Special Plan for the historic centre of León;

3. Recommends that:

- a) special attention should be given to the improvement and enhancement of the historic centre of León, especially in relation to the area surrounding the Cathedral. In order to improve life quality and urban landscape, the local government should consider actions aiming at authorizing the opening of the metropolitan commercial centre, removing disruptive commercial advertising signs in the historic centre, and burying the wires and cables of the public services;
- b) risk preparedness, especially for natural disasters, should be addressed as one of the main issues of the management plan;
- c) improve the coordination among national, local and Diocese stakeholders in order to improve the protection and management;
- d) the State Party should ensure that special Parliament fund for León Cathedral continues;
- e) the State Party should undertake, if not already done, a systematic inventory of the works of art and movable heritage contained in the nominated property.

The State Party supplied on February 2010 the following new information:

- A Management Plan entitled “*Instituto Nicaragüense – Plan de Manejo Catedral de León, Managua, 2009*”;
- Computerised (CAD) as-built drawings in plan, elevation and cross section of the Cathedral as well as a plan of the electrical system;
- A scaled drawing showing the historic centre of León and its protected area including all listed buildings;
- A scaled drawing showing the revised and extended León Cathedral’s buffer zone;
- A scaled drawing showing the historic and urban evolution of León Cathedral’s buffer zone.

Consultations

ICOMOS consulted various experts in this type of property.

Literature consulted (selection)

Angulo Iñiguez, D., et al., *Historia del Arte Hispanoamericano*, Barcelona, 1945-1956.

Angulo Iñiguez, D., *La arquitectura del siglo XVIII en Nicaragua*, Managua, 1988.

Gutiérrez, R., *Arquitectura y Urbanismo en Iberoamérica*, Madrid, 1989.

Kubler, G., and Soria, M., *Art and Architecture in Spain and Portugal and their American Dominions*. Baltimore, 1959.

Palacios, A., et. al., *Proyectos de Intervención en Catedral de León*, Nicaragua, 2009.

Polanco Quezada, C., *Diagnóstico Integral de la Catedral de León, Nicaragua*, Instituto Nicaraguense de Cultura (INC), 2009.

Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 8 to 12 September 2010.

Additional information requested and received from the State Party

ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 2 November 2010 requesting confirmation of extended buffer zone and schedules for management plan approvals. A response was received on November 2010 which was inadequate.

ICOMOS sent another letter on 16 December 2010 related to the following:

- The timetable for the formal approval by the State Party of the “*Instituto Nicaragüense – Plan de Manejo Catedral de León, Managua, 2009*”;
- The timetable for the approval and implementation of the “*Plan de Desarrollo Municipal*”;
- Confirmation of extended buffer zone.

The State party responded on 24 February 2011. The information provided have been carefully considered in the relevant sections.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

10 March 2011

2 The property

Description

The nominated property covers an area of 0.77ha, corresponding to an urban block containing the Cathedral and an open space to the front of the Cathedral. The area of the Cathedral is 5,295.48 square metres (0.529ha).

The architectural layout corresponds to a rectangular plan, according to the generalised model of the 18th century cathedrals, earlier employed in Lima and Cuzco, among other Latin American Cathedrals. The interior layout of the basilica consists of five longitudinal naves, the central one is the highest.

The roof was conceived to produce a particular luminosity in the inner space. Through the vaults with pendentives and lanterns, natural light penetrates and bathes the

interior and also ensures good ventilation. The roof consists of vaults, cupolas crowned by lanterns and ribbed vaults. The central nave has the shape of a Latin cross and its central axis is made up of 9 cupolas, two of them with lanterns. The external walls are, except for the main façade, barely decorated, with few reliefs. The main materials for the walls, columns and buttresses are brick and stone, bound with lime and sand. The baroque features, which prevail in the roof, cannot be perceived from the ground because the five large terraces are retreated and protected by balustrades surmounted by more than one hundred pinnacles and forty large and small cupolas, which constitute the external counterpoint of the vaults in pendentive. The harmony between the cupolas and the Cordillera constitutes a relation between architecture and the natural environment.

The main facade, from where the two towers rise, has two levels divided by an entablature decorated with frieze and garlands. It is composed of five spans (laterals, centrals and intermediates) separated by pairs of pilasters. Three of the eleven doors correspond to the main façade. Two styles are coexisting here, Baroque and Neo-classic.

As the Cathedral was built according to the tradition, i.e. starting with the chevet (external part of the choir), its principal facade is in general accordance with the 1767 plans and presents a later style. The main facade has elements from Greek and Roman architecture, such as the ionic capitals, the triangular pediments, the barrel vault and the cupola. Renaissance elements are also present, such as the basilica structure, the pinnacles, the horizontal proportion and the balustrade. From the Baroque architecture, the facade borrows the break of the entablature, the cornice, the columns, the curved pediments and the lack of definition of the columns capitals. From the Neo-classic style, it has lengthened pillars, covered with garlands; from Gothic architecture, the four-centred arch and the pinnacles; from the Mudejar architecture, the alfiz.

Because of the co-existence of various architectural styles, the Cathedral can be considered as an eclectic building. Baroque and Neo-classic styles prevail in the main facade and late Baroque in the chevet. Also, the influence of the architecture of Antigua Guatemala is manifested through the proportions and the volumes of the towers, the prevalence of horizontal over vertical lines, the general heaviness and the mortar decoration.

In the interior, the supports are cruciform pillars with the flanked frontages of pilasters. According to the architectural features of Antigua Guatemala, the pilasters are decorated with grooves up to the under-surface of the arcs. All pillars are formed by multiple beams. On the entablature, the cornice carries a convex frieze, another typical element of Antigua's architecture. The transept is dominated by a hemispherical cupola. There are no lateral chapels; they were replaced by the Way of the Cross, giving the inner area the particular perspective of the Spanish-American cathedrals.

The set of circles and multiple arcs prevail in the interior baroque structure of the Cathedral. The mannerist influence of the neo-classicism is however present in the vault of the Sanctuary, in which the interior abounds in ornaments. The golden altarpieces of baroque style decorated with statues and paintings were destroyed and replaced by neo-classic marble and cement niches. Some have been hidden in the basements of the Cathedral and others scattered in the rural localities of the county or in other cathedrals of Nicaragua, such as Matagalpa. The Cathedral has seven basements, whose function is to support the weight of the building, but which are also used as funerary crypts for famous people.

The cloister or Patio of the Prince, located behind the chevet, is representative of the traditional architecture of León: a central court surrounded of a gallery of wooden carved columns. This space has a singular charm, in many ways a typical Nicaraguan space, integrated into the building but dominated by the church. In the Patio of the Prince, the roof of the gallery leans on the building. It rests on a wooden structure covered with tiles.

The Cathedral also shelters important works of art; among them the wooden Flemish altarpiece, the Pulpit, the 1770 mosaic and a set of the oldest statues which survived the destruction and displacement of the altarpieces. The 14 stations of the Way of the Cross were painted by the Nicaraguan Antonio Sarria between the end of the 19th and the beginning of 20th centuries. In the art gallery of the Chapter Hall, fifty portraits of the bishops of the dioceses of Nicaragua and Costa Rica and the bishops of what became the diocese of León are kept.

History and development

Although the volcanoes of the region caused frequent catastrophes, the plain where León is located is a land of exceptional fertility thanks to the deposits of volcanic ash. At the beginning of the 16th century, the Province of Maribios was moderately populated; the inhabitants lived close to Lake Xolotlán or near its margins and the sea was nearby. The Amerindian population had chosen a place where the water and the hunting resources abounded, on volcanic grounds of an astonishing fertility, where they could also easily fish and had access to sea salt.

In 1523, the first Spanish exploration carried out by Gil González Dávila arrived from southern Nicaragua. Spaniards found gold but did not launch a conquest. In 1524, Francisco Hernández Córdoba took possession of the lands explored by Gil González and founded the towns of León and Granada, which were at the beginning mere military camps.

After an agreement with the local government, the inhabitants made the decision to abandon the first town of León and to re-establish it on its current site. The Mayor, Pedro Munguía Mendiola transmitted the decision to Guatemala; the authorization of the Spanish authorities came a month later, between February and March of 1610.

The Cathedral was started in the second half of the 18th century at a time when the local colonial society was emerging as a blend of the contributions of local Indian traditions and the traditions that arrived with Europeans and Africans. A cathedral responding to local expectations was finally achieved, following the building of five earlier churches. Some argued that León deserved this cathedral because it was the oldest ecclesiastical head office of Central America.

The demolition of the old church and the construction of the new Cathedral began in 1747, when Isidro Marín Bullón y Figueroa was the Bishop. Construction materials came from different places; the stone employed for the foundations and basements was extracted from the Chiquito River area, and the terracotta bricks used for the construction of the walls were manufactured in furnaces at the farm of Hato Nuevo, located 7 km away on the road between León and Managua. The workers were Amerindians, therefore it was a team of Spaniards, Creoles, Amerindians, Africans and mulattos who contributed to the building of the Cathedral.

In 1748, Bishop Bullón y Figueroa demolished the chevet of the earlier Cathedral and started the foundations. However, he died suddenly and there was a long delay in the resumption of the works. In March 1760, Fray Antonio de Navia Bolaños y Moscoso took office and works continued until 1761, a date which marks the opening of lime and brick factories. The Cathedral plans were drawn in 1762 by the Guatemalan architect Diego José de Porres Esquivel, and were sent to Spain to obtain the approval of the Crown, and to secure the necessary funds for continuing its construction. They were approved in 1767; the original documents are kept in the Archivo General de Indias (Seville). When the plans were sent to Spain, two thirds of the Cathedral had already been built.

The Diego José de Porres Esquivel style is manifested in the whole work. On arrival of the new bishop, Lorenzo Tristán y Esmoneta, the side aisles near the central nave were still missing. A few years later, in 1780, he had the honour of inaugurating the three naves. Tristán also acquired crowned ornaments, such as the ciboria and the chalices. Work on the front part, the turns and the Sanctuary's vault occurred between 1785 and 1795 under the direction of Bishop Juan Felix de Villegas. He entrusted Fray Francisco Gutiérrez, who had built three convents in Madrid, and directed the extensions of the collaterals and the completion of the Chapter Hall and the Almonedas' Room. The Sanctuary's vault was set up between 1795 and 1799. In 1810, the Dominican Bishop Nicolás García Jerés started one of the most prolific periods of building, including the construction of the towers and the main façade. This work was directed by Hipólito Estrada de Orellana.

In 1821, Nicaragua became independent from Spain and became a Catholic Spanish-speaking country, with an ethnically heterogeneous society. León was the capital

where the highest civil and religious authorities lived, as the Cathedral was the Seat of the Bishop of Nicaragua and Costa Rica. By this time, León had become a multi-ethnic society, and there were strong links between the human environment, the city and the building of the Cathedral. In the 19th century, new ideas emerged, such as those of the French Enlightenment. León was a place where liberal ideals were born and disseminated, and under the supervision of the Church, the primary, secondary and tertiary education in Nicaragua started, promoted by bishops and implemented by priests.

In the mid-19th century, the outside of the Cathedral was completed. On 6 March 1860, after the civil wars, Fray Bernardo Piñol y Aycinena took office at the diocese of Nicaragua. A few days later, he consecrated the Cathedral. That year, the southern tower and the chevet were rebuilt. On 20 November, the Cathedral was designated as a minor basilica by Pope Pie IX.

In relation to the physical condition of the building, damage has occurred through the centuries. Despite the high seismic activity in the area, the Cathedral survived many violent earthquakes. In 1960, the house building enterprise Cardenal Lavayo Fiallos carried out work on the northern tower. In the 1970s, the outside walls of the building were entirely covered with parasitic plants which damaged the ornaments of the façade. The roof was also invaded by plants and, was also cracked. In 1976, the walls, corroded by moisture, were treated to allow access to the underground levels. In 1983, the Cathedral was declared National Historic Heritage. Between 1992 and 1994, it was entirely restored, with the exception of the murals, frescos and the square.

3 Outstanding Universal Value, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The nomination dossier includes a comparative analysis between León Cathedral and other Central American monuments, especially those located in Antigua Guatemala, inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1979. Antigua was the crucible of artistic forms that spread to the rest of Central America. In spite of the constant seismic threat, the architecture developed in the 18th century, bears the sign of a particular and distinctive Baroque. It was a period of great constructions: churches, convents, civil buildings, etc. Concerning cathedral typologies, the most important work is León Cathedral, designed and planned by Diego José Porres Esquivel, who belonged to the main family of architects of Antigua. León is the only example on Antiguaño Baroque applied to a cathedral that is still standing and preserving its original conception and function.

There are stylistic differences between the Cathedrals of León and Antigua. Antigua Cathedral was finished in 1680, and has architectural features which pre-date the local Baroque; its main and lateral facades were conceived according to a classical Renaissance layout,

they are remarkably sober and their only ornaments are plain pillars, entablatures, pediments and niches. In the interior, the system of support corresponds to the 17th century: cross pillars following the Renaissance model instituted by Diego de Siloé in Grenade Cathedral (Spain) and used in Mexico City, Puebla, Guadalajara, Lima and Cuzco cathedrals. The interior of Antigua Cathedral is Renaissance style. Antigua Cathedral was seriously damaged by earthquakes, especially in 1773 when a good part of the structure was destroyed, rendering the building unable to perform its function.

Other Central American cathedrals (Ciudad Real and Comayagua) do not reach the size of León and are not faithful to the typological features given by Porres to Antigua's Baroque architecture. In those cathedrals there are no canalled pilasters, which were largely employed in León. The Tegucigalpa Cathedral does not respond to the typical lay-out of cathedrals, because it was first an 18th century parochial church, and made a cathedral in the early republican period (19th century).

In the rest of the Americas, there are other cathedrals that could be compared with that of León. Peru and Oaxaca (Mexico) show some similar problems regarding seismic risks. Architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries in these regions bears common features: massive constructions, scarcely elevated, essentially built up in stone and with no plaster. These features give the cathedrals a sober and heavy appearance (eg. Oaxaca, Cajamarca, Puno, Cuzco). León's Cathedral presents two distinctive features. First, stucco plaster makes the architecture appear lighter. The clear plaster balances the lack of height of the towers, whose proportions were calculated in relation to the seismic risk. Only Trujillo's Cathedral (Peru) currently has a similar kind of plaster. Secondly, the placement of the numerous windows and lanterns and the interior presence of ascending and curved lines, typically Baroque, and the absence of chapels, determine a sublime interior space, with very good lighting and ventilation, more than in the above mentioned cathedrals. These two specific features allow León's Cathedral to be seen as an example of integration of functionalism and aesthetics, put together in spite of the geological constraints.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis provided by the State Party demonstrates the similarities and differences between the nominated property and other similar Latin American monuments, most of them included in historic centres inscribed on the World Heritage List. As a result, León Cathedral demonstrates the use of an extended building layout of Spanish origin, used in the Spanish Americas between the 16th and 18th centuries. In the framework of Latin American colonial cathedrals, the monument illustrates a specific architectural interpretation typical of Antigua Guatemala that reached its most perfect expression in León, responding to specific geographical and climatic conditions.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- The monument is a unique testimony to the application of a regional architectural style to a religious building following the layout of cathedrals, which fulfils the original functions and preserves its integrity.
- The monument exceptionally reflects the influence of this regional style and its consolidation. As the main architectural work of the society that built it, it is the expression of Spanish art and of regional characteristics, shaped by the geographical environment and the society that supported its erection. The building reflects the Central American experiences in architecture during the colonial period. If earthquakes damaged Antigua in 1773, León Cathedral survived adverse circumstances, such as earthquakes and political and economic difficulties. It combines exceptional function and architectural aesthetics.
- The monument is a unique testimony of the Antigüense (from Antigua Guatemala) Baroque, it retains its integrity and provides access to the work of the main architects that gave origin to this regional style
- The building is the material expression of the process of formation of the Latin American society; it allows study of particular features and the social, political and cultural relationships during an essential period of its history, when it started affirming its particular identity which led to the independence movements of the early 19th century. It is a centre of exceptional immaterial cultural manifestations and is linked to individuals from the realm of an art of great importance.

ICOMOS considers that this justification is appropriate because it sets forth the property's exceptional architectural and societal attributes.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

The nomination dossier includes no specific discussion of integrity of this property.

ICOMOS considers that the monument has been properly conserved. It is intact and although subject to repair and maintenance, has not had extensive alterations.

ICOMOS notes the unsightly commercial communication tower located in front of the Cathedral and recommends that it should be relocated.

Authenticity

The nomination dossier includes a detailed study of the authenticity of the nominated property, based on the following aspects: plans, style, function, materials, workmanship and setting. With regards to plans, the building was constructed according to the original project (kept in the India's Archives in Seville) by Diego José de Porres and constitutes an excellent example of a Hispanic-American cathedral of the 18th century, with a typical rectangular plan, following the model of Seville Cathedral and extended all over the Americas. The monument has not undergone substantial modifications to its plan or its original structure. The cathedral keeps the original styles with no modifications: Baroque and Neo-classical. The building fulfils the original social and religious functions. It is the space that allows cohesion for social, cultural and political relationships among the inhabitants of León. For Nicaraguan society, the monument is the landmark of the main religious festivity of the country, the Gritería.

Building materials are those used in the original construction. Restoration projects implemented during the 1990's by national and local organisations have strictly respected original materials and techniques. The Cathedral has a predominant position from an urban point of view. Facing the central plaza, it was the nucleus of administrative and social functions in the city.

ICOMOS considers that authenticity is maintained by the permanence of the original plan, materials, functions, social significance and relationship with the urban setting.

ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), (v) and (vi).

Criterion (i): represent a masterpiece of human creative genius;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that León's Cathedral testifies the artistic perfection reached despite many obstacles. Built in spite of natural, economic, political and social constraints suffered by the province of Nicaragua in the 18th century, it is a masterpiece from the point of view of art. In a superb space, it combines the lay-out of cathedrals with harmonious proportions, featured by the equilibrium of horizontal and vertical lines, interior sumptuousness featured by a remarkable curvilinear movement, abundant lighting and natural ventilation, and the extraordinary relation it achieves with its natural setting. Architectural styles of the period (baroque and neo-classicism) merge with the framework of the features of the region, including the adoption of elements of León's civil architecture. This is a massive construction that responds to the seismic characteristics of the area.

The cathedral maintains a significant ensemble of movable properties spanning from Gothic to neo-classicism; it constitutes a good example of furniture art and styles of the colonial period. It has resulted in the establishment of an architectural school in Nicaragua inspired in Antigua (Guatemala).

The Cathedral combines aesthetic criteria and functional necessities, and has survived the impacts of volcanic activity to which it has been exposed over time.

While recognising the importance of the monument for the Nicaraguan and Central American societies, ICOMOS considers that the property is an example of the application of several architectural and stylistic resources but does not consider it a masterpiece of a human creative genius.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

Criterion (ii): exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that León Cathedral is an example of different architectural influences of Spanish Art adapted to the geographical and social space, and to the environment of Latin America, especially in the city of León. Different influences are translated in the building, resulting in its own characteristics that stem from the geographical environment and local workmanship, reflecting the new society appearing in the Americas, particularly in Central America in the 18th century. This new society created a monument that expresses its identity, its social, religious and artistic syncretism, and interacts with the landscape.

ICOMOS considers that the significance of León Cathedral as an example of an exchange of human values in relation to a specific area of the world has been demonstrated by the several influences that merge in the monument and by its significance for a multi-cultural society.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

Criterion (iii): bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is still living or which has disappeared;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that León's cathedral is a testimony to Hispanic-American traditions since it expresses the cultural and religious syncretism arising from the merging of local traditions (Spanish and Amerindian) that led to new ways of life. The culture given by the Spaniards to the New World was predominantly religious; that is why many of these cultural expressions relate to the Christian faith; such as churches, saints' portraits, religious

sculptures, etc. Cathedrals were the achievement of the efforts of inhabitants and constituted the highest expressions of this cultural identity. León Cathedral is a remarkable example of the constancy of a new society.

ICOMOS considers that the arguments proposed by the State Party to support the application of this criterion have already been evoked for the application of criterion (ii).

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

Criterion (iv): be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that León's Cathedral constitutes an outstanding example of a regional Central American architectural style. In the span of time between the 16th and 18th centuries, Hispanic America was the scenery of an historic and cultural phenomenon of world relevance - the encounter between two worlds and the implantation of a European culture in a new continent. In architectural terms, cathedrals are the best expressions of this phenomenon. In Central America, art and architecture adopted local expressions, particularly during the 18th century, in the Antigüeano Baroque, whose main monument was not erected in Guatemala, but in León. At the same time, the monument reflects the transition from Baroque towards new architectural and artistic expressions typical of the 19th century.

ICOMOS considers that León Cathedral constitutes an outstanding example of the regional interpretation of a typology of religious building merging several architectural and stylistic sources in an ensemble featured by its unity and architectural and social significance.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

Criterion (v): be an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land-use, or sea-use, which is representative of a culture (or cultures), or human interaction with the environment especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that León Cathedral illustrates the conception of urban space of New World towns, and of the related social relationships. This space symbolized the emergence, during colonial times, of new forms of cultural expression that would later become the local cultural identity. The Cathedral has maintained its significant position since 1610 onwards and reflects the spiritual, cultural and social life of the society that erected it.

While recognising the importance of the Cathedral as the core of the town and main reference in the urban landscape, ICOMOS considers that it does not reflect, by itself, all the features of traditional urban settlements.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

Criterion (vi): be directly or tangibly associated with events or living traditions, with ideas, or with beliefs, with artistic and literary works of outstanding universal significance;

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that León Cathedral is the nucleus of important cultural manifestations that are landmarks of Latin American cultural identity, especially the traditional Gritería, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception. This religious celebration of national importance is currently reproduced in other Central and North American countries. At the same time, León Cathedral is linked to historical facts relevant in Latin-America and at world level: the first reactions against the colonial regime; the life and works of Rubén Darío, founder of the first poetry movement born in Latin America and whose work reached world significance; the hero of independence Miguel Larreynaga; the scientist Luis H. Debayle; the poets Salomón de la Selva and Alfonso Cortés; and the musician José de la Cruz Mena.

ICOMOS recognises that the nominated property has an unquestionable social and cultural significance at national and regional levels, but those considerations do not reach a universal significance. The relationship between the poet Rubén Darío, who reached world-wide recognition and the nominated property, has not been sufficiently demonstrated by the State Party.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (ii) and (iv) and conditions of authenticity and integrity and that Outstanding Universal Value has been demonstrated.

Description of the attributes

From a historical point of view, León Cathedral is an outstanding testimony to colonial Central-American society. The author of the project, Diego José de Porres Esquivel, adds historical value to the monument, since Porres was the most outstanding architect of Antigua Guatemala during the 18th century.

The Cathedral is an example of the application of architectural layouts that were brought by the Spaniards to the New World and lasted over 300 years in the construction of churches. In this case, the application of the typical quadrangular layout is integrated with architectural features coming from Antigua Guatemala that reached in León their most complete expression.

Among the Antigua features are the mainly horizontal proportions and the low and thick towers as a response to earthquakes, and the internal and external decoration. Finally, from a stylistic point of view, León Cathedral constitutes a remarkable example of transition from Baroque to Neo-Classical.

4 Factors affecting the property

Development pressures

The impact of human activities is substantial in the historic centre of León, enhanced by the prolonged economic crisis. In the neighbourhood of the Cathedral, human factors constituting a threat for the conservation of the monument are concentrated. The area serves a double function: it is a commercial and an institutional centre. Most economic, social and cultural activities are developed in the area; as a result, big gatherings of people occur, most of them coming from surrounding neighbourhoods.

In response to point 3.a of decision 32 COM 8B.45 (Commercial Centre), the State Party, with the sponsorship of the *Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional* called for the construction of a new Metropolitan Commercial Centre in 2008, which was aimed at relocating the public market's increasing demand for commercial spaces and to reduce the current traffic loads, pollution and vibration, noise levels, waste disposal, and street vendors. The commercial centre was built and the street vendors were moved to this new facility but were immediately replaced by new street vendors. Municipal authorities realize that this is essentially a cultural and political problem and intend to raise the matter to higher levels of authority. Other development pressures are being addressed in the Municipal Development Plan (see section 5 below).

ICOMOS considers that the State Party has gone a considerable way since 2007 to meet point 3.a of decision 32 COM 8B.45. Building and opening the commercial centre and relocating street vendors were an important step towards improving the Cathedral's immediate environment. ICOMOS recognises that the issues concerning street vendors remain unresolved and will require long-term cultural changes and political action to affect the desired changes.

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party continues to work to find ways to resolve the situation concerning street vendors who use the streets and public spaces surrounding the Cathedral for their businesses.

Tourism pressures

León is a key place for tourism in Nicaragua, based on its historic heritage. The Cathedral is one of the main attractions of the country with a considerable number of visitors (45,000 in 2009). The provision of tourist services and facilities for the Cathedral started in 2001; some

guided tours are available for both Nicaraguans and foreigners.

The tourism use of the Cathedral is limited, due to insufficient number of guides and surveillance staff and lack of information material for visitors. Visitors access to the roof can be a risk to the visitors as well as to the building. The number of visitors is not controlled, and this could be a cause of deterioration. The Direction of Cultural Heritage has recommended that visitor groups should not exceed 10 people in order to prevent accidents, and reduce the impacts on the building.

ICOMOS notes that the INTUR (the National Tourism Agency) is in the process of upgrading and updating the “*Plan Integral de Turismo*” (Comprehensive Tourism Plan) nationwide. This plan will include a component which will comprise specifically the Cathedral and city of León.

Environmental pressures

There are serious problems with pollution of surrounding areas. Agricultural practices have led to the deterioration of the quality of the land and water resources, and surface and subsoil waters are polluted. In addition, pollution of the Chiquito River results from the activities of craftsmen concentrated next to the river banks near the Cathedral.

Air pollution caused by motor vehicle traffic is also a concern. Due to the configuration of the historic centre, the streets cannot absorb the current volume of traffic. This pollution is one of the factors of deterioration of the Cathedral walls. The circulation of heavy vehicles also creates noise pollution affecting the experience of the monument for visitors and the community. Waste management systems are inadequate in this part of the city.

ICOMOS notes that since 2007, the Municipality has begun to implement various elements of the Municipal Development Plan (in preparation) that include traffic and noise pollution reduction, burying of electrical cables and regulating commercial signs.

Natural disasters

The monument is threatened by natural disasters; among them seismic activity, volcanic eruptions, landslides, hurricanes and storms. Earthquakes represent the most serious risk since they can reach 8 on the Richter scale. León County is classified in the fourth level of risk at the national level; it is level 8 in a 0-10 range. León is located next to the Pacific coast, the most threatened area in Nicaragua. The city has suffered strong earthquakes over time; buildings constructed over or next to faults are the most threatened. This is the case of the Cathedral, located next to faults that cross the historic centre. Concerning volcanic risks, León County is classified in the highest category of risk; in a scale 0-10, it is classified 10. The town is threatened by three nearby volcanoes: Cerro Negro, Telica and Momotombo.

Regarding hurricanes, León is ranked 4 in a 0-10 range and 9 regarding floods. The indirect impact can be more serious than the direct impacts. Hurricanes generally produce strong winds from the Pacific, causing persistent and intense rains, with flooding occurring particularly in areas near watercourses. This is a cause of risk for León Cathedral, located by Chiquito River. Intense rains overload the Cathedral roofs; water infiltration also affects the interior, threatening the stability of walls, plaster and painting. In terms of the frequency of storms, León is placed second in the categories of risk.

The SINAPRED institution (*Sistema Nacional Para la Prevención, Mitigación y Atención de Desastres*) should mitigate the impact of these natural disasters.

Impact of climate change

Although the nomination dossier does not specifically address climate change, it is evident that the region where the city of León is located is very vulnerable to these impacts, due to its exposure to phenomena like cyclones, storms, heavy rains and winds. The State Party has demonstrated an awareness of the climatic risk that, together with seismic and volcanoes activity, contribute to define León Cathedral as a place exposed to high levels of risk.

The nominated property continues to face natural decay and deterioration processes caused by excessive humidity, moisture, masonry parasites, fungi, solar radiation, expansion and contraction due to temperature differentials, intense rainfalls, and rising damp. These natural phenomena are typical of this region and climate and, even though they are not serious causes for concern, they do require permanent monitoring and regular maintenance to remain at acceptable levels.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are related to natural factors (seismic activity, volcanoes, hurricanes and heavy rains) and to development and environmental pressures caused by human activities. A rigorous risk preparedness plan is necessary to address these risks, including the implications for land use and urban planning. These considerations should be integrated into the existing Cathedral Management Plan (see Risk Preparedness in Section 5 below).

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The nominated area consists of an urban block of 0.7 ha corresponding to the Cathedral and the open space at its front.

The original nomination dossier provided for a buffer zone of 12.55ha, corresponding to 13 urban blocks of León's historic centre. Notwithstanding the fact that the original 2007 proposal proved satisfactory, the State Party has

proposed to extend the buffer zone, from 13 blocks/12.55 hectares, to 27 blocks/28.71, and include 3 additional urban/visual axes, on the grounds that:

- The new extended buffer zone includes other important churches and buildings which, since colonial times, were meant to establish an urban relationship with the Cathedral.
- The new extended buffer zone also includes more cultural and historical buildings of great interest, which have been already surveyed, studied and catalogued, some of which are currently under restoration.
- The 3 additional axes will provide additional protection regarding long-distance urban relationships / visuals between the Cathedral and specific historic urban neighbourhoods, thus supporting its role as a city landmark.

ICOMOS sent letters on 2 November and 16 December 2010, to receive confirmation on this extension of the buffer zone.

In its letter sent on 24 February 2011, the State Party confirms the rationale for the extended buffer zone and its size. The letter also reports the description of the three urban/visual axes. There is however no explicit confirmation of the official extension of the buffer zone.

ICOMOS congratulates the State Party for extending the buffer zone; this measure should further enhance the property's protection. However, ICOMOS notes that the linear axes along the Calle Real and through El Sagrario and Guadalupe neighbourhoods do not contribute to strengthen the safeguard of the values of the nominated property, whilst their delimitation and shape make difficult to enforce any measure for ancillary protection to Leon Cathedral.

ICOMOS therefore recommends that these two linear axes be removed from the buffer zone.

ICOMOS considers that the boundary of the nominated property and the extended boundary of the buffer zone are adequate, except for the linear axes along the Calle Real and towards Guadalupe neighbourhood through El Sagrario, which ICOMOS recommends be removed from the buffer zone.

Ownership

The Cathedral is owned by the Diocese of León.

Protection

Legal Protection

The Constitution of Nicaragua establishes that the State is responsible for the conservation and protection of the cultural heritage of the nation, including archaeological, historical and linguistic heritage.

At the national level, León Cathedral has been registered as Cultural, Historic and Artistic Heritage of the Nation by

Decree of the Minister of Culture dated 7 July 1983. All properties constituting the historic and artistic heritage of the Nation are protected by specific laws, especially Decree-Law 1142 on Protection of Cultural Heritage of the Nation (1982), modified by Decree-Law 1237 (1983). This Law establishes the basis of the current structure for heritage protection in the country. No intervention can be undertaken without authorisation of the Direction of Cultural Heritage of the Nicaraguan Institute of Culture. In the specific case of León, the Direction has a group of Inspectors that oversee projects and supervise works on historic buildings, in coordination with the Department of the Historic Centre at León Municipality. In 1999, León Cathedral was declared by the National Assembly "Monument of the Millennium" by Decree 2432.

Law 261 on Municipalities establishes that local governments are responsible for protection of archaeological, historical, linguistic and artistic heritage. Decree 52 of 1997 establishes that local governments shall maintain cultural and historic sites and conserve landscape with the aim of promoting national and international tourism.

The Cathedral is located in the historic centre of León. Use and management must take into account national and local legal instruments. Municipal rules on regulation of urban development were passed in 1998, including land use and conservation of environmental and cultural resources. Implementation of the rules is the responsibility of the Direction of Physical Planning and Local Development.

At the local level, technical control and supervision is the responsibility of the Department of the Historic Centre; all interventions must be approved by the Cultural Heritage Office, which has implemented municipal ordinances for León's urban development. These ordinances are the main tools used for regulating development, establishing zones, densities, etc. The Municipality's Department of Historic Centre has recently finished the draft for the new urban rules as part of a Special Plan of Protection. These rules are under revision for approval by the Cultural Heritage Office.

In response to point 2.b of decision 32 COM 8B.45 (Complete Special Plan for the historic centre of León), the Municipality is updating and integrating all development and revitalization city plans (including the Special Plan of Protection for the Historic Centre, the Cathedral Square Revitalization Plan and the Cathedral's Master Plan) into a single all-in-one master plan known as "*Plan de Desarrollo Municipal*" (Municipal Development Plan), which is to become the ultimate protection and management comprehensive tool for the entire Historic District.

ICOMOS supports this initiative which should ensure better coordinated protection, conservation and management of the property and improved environmental conditions in the Historic Centre.

ICOMOS sent letters on 2 November and 16 December 2010 to request the timetable for the approval and implementation of the "*Plan de Desarrollo Municipal*".

The State Party responded on 24 February 2011 that the municipal authorities are working to achieve the approval of this Plan and of the Master Plan for the nominated property.

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party completes, approves and begins implementation of the Municipal Development Plan in order to meet the requirements of point 2.b of decision 32 COM 8B.45.

Effectiveness of protection measures

The inclusion of León Cathedral in the category of Cultural, Historic and Artistic Heritage of the Nation establishes a special legal protection regime. These measures appear to be effective for the protection of the property.

ICOMOS considers that the legal protection of the nominated property is adequate. In order to ensure the protection of the buffer zone, ICOMOS urges the State Party to approve the "*Plan de Desarrollo Municipal*" (Municipal Development Plan) and the corresponding legal instruments for its implementation.

Conservation

Inventories, recording, research

The 1992-1994 restoration project was preceded by the inventory and diagnosis of the Cathedral. The work has been documented photographically, and the documentation is available at the National Library and Archives. The Catalogue of immovable cultural properties of León was made in 1994. In 2005, a new survey was carried out. The resulting documentation is available in the Department of the Historic Centre in León. As one of the main historic monuments of the country, León Cathedral has been the subject of much historical and architectural research. The bibliography mentioned in the nomination dossier includes a range of published research works. Concerning training of professionals, the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua trains ethnologists, archaeologists, sociologists and historians, and the National University of Engineering trains architects and engineers. Both universities have undertaken research works on cultural heritage, including León Cathedral.

Since 2007, a full set of computerised (CAD) architectural survey drawings was prepared. A complete condition survey of the building and a partial artefacts inventory was completed in 2009. The results of this inventory are included in the 2009 Cathedral Management Plan. This work was undertaken in response to point 3.e of decision 32 COM 8B.45 concerning the undertaking of a systematic inventory. Although the nomination dossier and the Cathedral Management Plan include a detailed description of movable works of art, only an incomplete

inventory of the Cathedral's treasures has been supplied. León Cathedral authorities argue that revealing the details of the entire treasure may jeopardize its safety at this time. Stakeholders are currently exploring ways to fully complete the treasury's inventory while ensuring its conservation and safety.

ICOMOS supports this cautious approach that is meant to safeguard the Cathedral's treasure.

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party make special arrangements with the Diocese authorities to complete the Cathedral's treasure inventory while ensuring its conservation and safeguard.

Present state of conservation

The nomination dossier includes a detailed report on the monument's current state of conservation, including assessment of deterioration in relation to each material component. With regard to the roof, the exterior plaster has surface cracks and damage to the drainage system has been caused by environmental pollution. These factors contribute to the problems of humidity in the interior of the building, affecting the structural system, especially the arches. The balustrade that crowns the walls of the naves is cracked and some pieces are detached. Remains of parasitic organic materials are visible in the interior or the roof structure, causing fissures that allow leakage into the roof space. The Patio del Príncipe does not currently have any major conservation problems; some tiles are broken or displaced, and some components have been poorly repaired. The structure is also weakened by the poor condition of electrical wiring.

External walls have surface cracks. Some interventions have also inappropriately used cement. Considerable fissures are observed, and there are traces of corrosion on the elements supporting the bells. In general, painting of the internal surfaces is in good condition. Internal walls are affected by humidity coming from the roof, and there are fissures in some arches. Some sculptures on the interior walls are damaged, and some are missing. Humidity is also a problem in the basement walls, probably coming from the soil porosity. Solid waste has accumulated in the small ventilation openings. Wooden doors and windows are in good condition. Some of them need some preventive maintenance or restoration. Floors are in good condition; replacements have been undertaken according to technical requirements appropriate for conservation.

ICOMOS appreciates the detailed report on the state of conservation included in the nomination dossier and the Cathedral Management Plan and considers that the property continues to have an acceptable level of conservation. There are, however, significant causes of decay that, if properly addressed, could be controlled and reduced to acceptable levels. ICOMOS encourages the State Party to increase its efforts to control these causes of deterioration in the on-going restoration plan.

Active Conservation measures

Between 1990 and 1994 the Ministry of Culture carried out restoration works to the Cathedral, coordinated by the Direction of Cultural Heritage of the Municipality of León and the Committee for the restoration of the Cathedral. The project aimed at conserving the cultural and socio-economic values of the monument. In the work plans for conservation of cultural heritage for 2007, the Direction plans to implement new conservation and restoration project, similar to that of 1992-1994. This project is needed in order to address the progressive deterioration of the monument. This project is included in the Cathedral Management Plan annexed to the nomination dossier and is awaiting final approval to proceed.

Concerning point 2.a of decision 32 COM 8B.45 (Conservation planning): the State Party supplied the Cathedral Management Plan entitled "*Instituto Nicaragüense – Plan de Manejo Catedral de León, Managua, 2009*" which includes schedules for the nominated property's restoration.

During the last 3 years, the conservation actions undertaken by the State Party include the preparation of the as-built and survey plans; a complete building condition assessment; plan / design / schedule intervention projects; complete restoration of the Way of the Cross paintings; and exterior wall plaster maintenance.

ICOMOS sent letters on 2 November and 16 December 2010 to request the timetable for the formal approval by the State Party of the Cathedral Management Plan.

The State Party responded on 24 February 2011 and provided a copy of the "Acuerdo" n. 54 – 2010 signed on 15 October 2010 through which the Conservation Plan for the Cathedral was approved by the *Instituto Nicaragüense de Cultura* (INC). However, the above mentioned agreement has not been signed by the Diocese of León, which is the owner and main user of the nominated property. The agreement only mentions in its article two that the INC with the Diocese will establish the means necessary for the implementation of this Conservation Plan.

ICOMOS urges the State Party to continue the dialogue with all relevant stakeholders to build consensus on the Cathedral Conservation Plan as well as the Management Plan for the nominated property and to achieve their approval and implementation by all stakeholders.

Maintenance

Quality maintenance is carried out regularly on the monument, but ICOMOS is concerned by the use of water blasting techniques used during recent wall plaster maintenance.

ICOMOS recommends that maintenance techniques and programmes be reviewed by a qualified conservation professional.

ICOMOS is concerned by a potentially dangerous situation regarding the electrical system and connection to the Cathedral. The Cathedral has two different and separate electrical connections that travel aerially and connect to an open-air unprotected electrical panel. A recent inspection revealed that the overall electrical charges are not balanced and the lightning conductor isn't grounded.

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party addresses the electrical system connection issue and the lightning system grounding issue urgently because they are public safety issues.

Effectiveness of conservation measures

The León Cathedral continues to be conserved to acceptable international levels of conservation that maintain its integrity and authenticity. ICOMOS appreciates the progress made by the State Party in relation to the conservation of the property.

ICOMOS recommends that the Conservation Plan and the Management Plan for the Cathedral be approved by all relevant stakeholders as soon as possible and implemented as a means of ensuring the long-term conservation of the property.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The management of the property is the responsibility of a number of public and private institutions, with varying levels of expertise. At the national level and pursuant to the Constitution, the Nicaraguan Institute for Culture (INC) has the primary responsibility for conservation and promotion of national culture. The Institute was established by Decree-Law 427 in 1989, and is under the Ministry on Education, Culture and Sports.

At the local level, the Department of the Historic Centre of León Municipality is responsible for the protection and preservation of the historic centre and the main buildings. The Department is in charge of the implementation of the Special Plan for the revitalisation of the Historic Centre, urban control, formulation and supervision of projects and communication and public awareness activities.

The Diocese of León, as the owner of the building, is also involved in the conservation and management of the property. The Diocese has been responsible for the administration of the Cathedral since its construction in the 18th century and acts together with national and local institutions responsible for cultural heritage. The Cathedral Management Plan proposes the creation of several new planning, technical and management coordinating bodies,

but as first custodian, the Diocese has not agreed to the proposed inter-institutional Cathedral Preservation Council management body. The stakeholders are discussing new arrangements to create such a body.

Concerning point 3.c of decision 32 COM 8B.45 (Coordination), though coordination and teamwork has improved among the main stakeholders since 2007, there remains a great deal of progress to be made on this issue.

ICOMOS encourages the State Party to continue its efforts towards building trust and collaboration amongst the stakeholders.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

The Nicaraguan Institute for Culture (INC) implements a plan of cultural development that includes a cultural heritage conservation programme. The programme is financed by the general budget of the Republic and is implemented by the Directorate for Cultural Heritage. The Plan sets out strategies and specific activities determining the priorities. León Cathedral is considered an absolute priority of the Nicaraguan State. This is illustrated by the large 1992-1994 restoration project, to the regular surveillance and to an annual budget for contributing to its maintenance. The Cathedral Management Plan was prepared by the Directorate for Cultural Heritage (INC 2009).

The Cathedral Management Plan has not yet been officially approved by the State Party.

ICOMOS sent letters on 2 November and 16 December 2010 to receive information about the approval of the management Plan for St. Leon Cathedral and the Development Plan for the Municipality.

The State Party has responded on 24 February 2011 informing that approval of the management Plan is expressed in the Administrative Agreement signed on 8 November 2010.

ICOMOS recommends that the Cathedral Management Plan be officially approved by all the executive stakeholders (León's Diocese and the Municipality – the INC has approved the Conservation Plan for the Cathedral) and by the State Party itself.

As mentioned earlier, in response to point 2.b of decision 32 COM 8B.45 (Special Plan for the Historic Centre of León) the Municipality is updating and integrating all urban development and revitalization city plans (including the Cathedral Management Plan and the Plan for the Historic Centre of León) into a single all-in-one master plan known as "*Plan de Desarrollo Municipal*" (Municipal Development Plan). This will ensure that all development activities and projects are better coordinated.

ICOMOS sent a letter on 16 December 2010 to receive information about the timetable for the approval of the *Plan de Desarrollo Municipal*.

The State Party responded on 24 February 2011 that the municipal authorities are working to finalise the approval of this plan.

ICOMOS supports this approach and acknowledges that some parts of the Plan that positively impact the preservation of the Cathedral are already in progress, such as traffic improvements, electric cables burial and commercial signs control. However, ICOMOS recommends that the State Party continue to work for the final approval and implementation of this plan, which is extremely important to ensure the appropriate level of safeguard of the nominated property and of its buffer zone.

Visitors to Nicaragua and especially León and the Cathedral have doubled in recent years, reaching over one million nationwide and 45,000 annually at the Cathedral. ICOMOS is concerned that the current visitors' management system is weak and does not adequately support the interpretation the Cathedral's outstanding history and features. There is no interpretation centre; there is a lack of qualified tour guides; tour operators misrepresent the Cathedral's history; there is no official effective tourism management plan in effect; the policing of tourists is ineffective; there is no tourism information office in proximity of the Cathedral.

On the other hand, ICOMOS notes that the INTUR (the National Tourism Agency) is in the process of updating the *Plan Integral de Turismo* (Comprehensive Tourism Plan) nationwide and that it will include specific information about the Cathedral.

Risk preparedness

ICOMOS appreciates the exhaustive and frank recognition of the different risk factors that actually or potentially affect this property. Concerning point 3.b of decision 32 COM 8B.45 (Risk preparedness), the issue to include risk preparedness in the nominated property's Management Plan, remains to be addressed.

Involvement of the local communities

León Cathedral is highly valued as one of the main historic and artistic monuments of the country. Citizens have been consulted during the preparation of the Plan for the conservation of the surroundings of the Cathedral. Some civil associations, among them the Nicaraguan Chamber of Tourism, chamber of commerce, residents' organisations, professional and artistic organisations have participated in the debates and the development of the plan.

Resources, including staffing levels, expertise and training

At the national level, the Nicaraguan Institute for Culture has 90 specialists and technicians in conservation and management of cultural heritage that are responsible for the execution, supervision and monitoring of conservation actions, specially for León Cathedral. At the local level, the Municipality of León, through the Department for Historic Centre and the School-Workshop, has 82 specialists and technicians in protection and conservation of cultural heritage of the historic centre. The staff includes 2 architects, 3 engineers and 67 technicians with a range of specialisations.

Regarding the private sector, there are a considerable number of specialists and technicians in diverse fields related to cultural heritage management both at the national and local levels that can provide services to the public administration. Moreover, some educational institutions have specialised professionals; among them the Centre for Archaeology and Documentation and the Centre for Geological Research, both belonging to the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua, and the School of Architecture of the National University of Engineering (Managua).

Concerning training in building technology, the Municipality of León operates the School-Workshop of León, under the patronage of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI). Since 1991, the School has offered technical training with the goal of providing human resources for heritage restoration projects. The School has participated in several projects; among them the restoration of León Cathedral between 1992 and 1994. Concerning training of professionals, the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua trains ethnologists, archaeologists, sociologists and historians, and the National University of Engineering trains architects and engineers. Both universities have undertaken research works on cultural heritage, including León Cathedral.

Concerning staffing levels and their expertise, The Municipality has made considerable progress since 2007. The municipal administration has hired more staff with higher levels of expertise. They have also acquired more equipment (computers, software, etc.).

The national government provides a special budget for restoration and conservation of León Cathedral. At the local level, the Department of the Historic Centre is supported by collaboration with the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation.

Concerning point 3.d of decision 32 COM 8B.45 (Special Parliament Fund), the State Party has reinstated the Special Parliament Fund for the León Cathedral that had been terminated in 2007.

Effectiveness of current management

Current management systems are effective in ensuring the basic conservation of the Cathedral but are weak

concerning the overall management of the nominated property and its buffer zone.

ICOMOS considers that management structure and plans are adequate. ICOMOS recommends that the Cathedral Management Plan and the Municipal Development Plan be approved and implemented and that risk preparedness be included in those plans. ICOMOS encourages the State Party to continue its efforts towards building trust and collaboration amongst the stakeholders.

6 Monitoring

The Department of the Historic Centre (Municipality of León) and the Direction of Cultural Heritage (Nicaraguan Institute of Culture) are in charge of monitoring the state of conservation of properties in the historic centre.

The nomination dossier includes a list of key indicators and periodicity of measurements. Indicators are related to specific material components, to staff, to financial aspects, to cultural activities and to instruments and procedures for the conservation of the monument.

ICOMOS considers that key indicators and monitoring arrangements are adequate to monitor the state of conservation of the property in relation to its Outstanding Universal Value.

7 Conclusions

ICOMOS considers that León Cathedral is not only the main historic and artistic monument of Nicaragua, but also a building of high significance for Central America. The monument bears historical, architectural, artistic and environmental values that link it to the cultural identity of a specific region in the world. From an architectural and artistic point of view, León Cathedral is one of the best expressions of Central American religious architecture; it testifies to the persistence of layouts spread by the Spaniards in the Americas between the 16th and 18th centuries and, at the same time, bears specific features linked to a particular regional style from Antigua Guatemala, and achieving in León its most significant example.

Although the town is located in a region subject to natural disasters, the building has survived, and maintains a high degree of integrity and authenticity. Although improvements are recommended, the property is adequately protected. Management is weak but should be significantly improved by the adoption and implementation of the Cathedral Management Plan and the Municipal Development Plan.

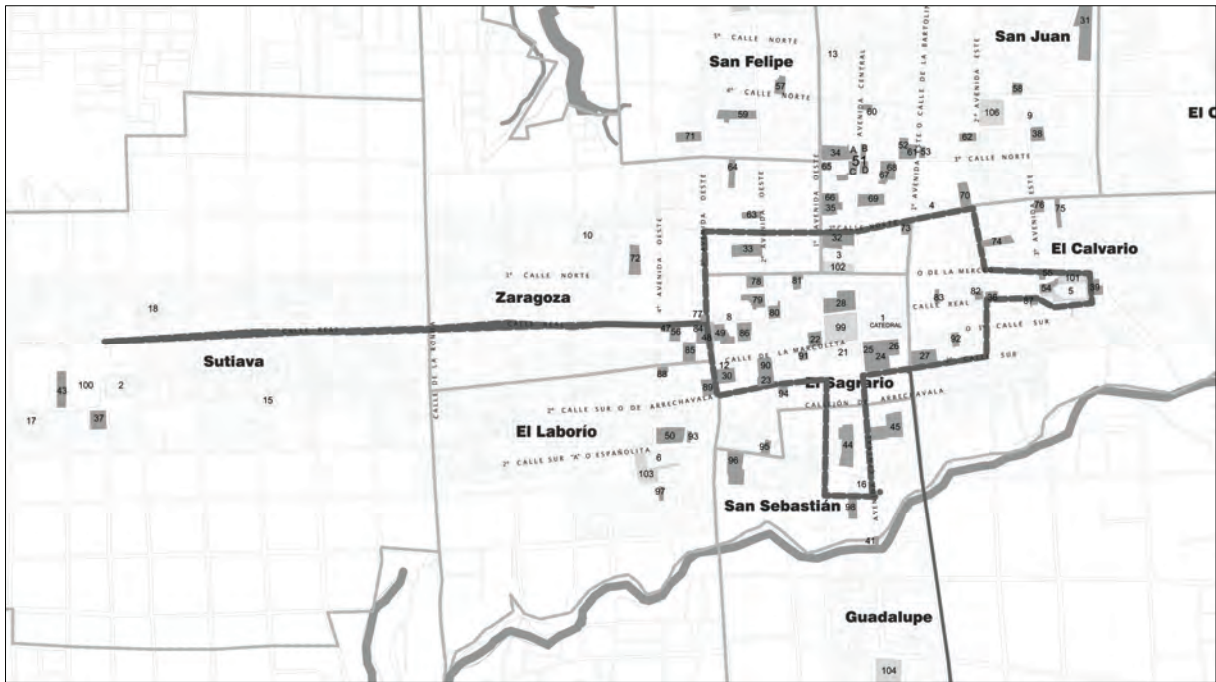
Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the nomination of León Cathedral, Nicaragua, be **referred back** to the State Party in order to allow it to:

- Officially approve and implement the Cathedral Management Plan by all the executive stakeholders and by the State Party itself;
- Complete, approve and begins implementation of the Municipal Development Plan;
- Slightly amend the boundaries of the buffer zone by removing the linear axes along the Calle Real and through El Sagrario towards Guadalupe.

ICOMOS further recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- Continue to work to find ways to resolve the situation concerning street vendors who use the streets and public spaces surrounding the Cathedral for their businesses;
- Address the electrical system connection issue and the lightning system grounding issue urgently because they are public safety issues;
- Relocate the unsightly commercial communication tower located in front of the Cathedral;
- Complete the Cathedral Management Plan with a section on risk preparedness;
- Continue its efforts towards building trust and collaboration amongst the stakeholders;
- Make special arrangements with the Diocese authorities to complete the Cathedral's treasure inventory while ensuring its conservation and safeguard.



Map showing the revised boundaries of the nominated property



West façade



North façade



Interior view



Prince Court