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## Historic Centre of Agadez (Niger) No 1268

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### Official name as proposed by the State Party

Agadez (Historic Centre of Agadez)

### Location

Town of Agadez, Capital of Agadez Region,  
Niger

### Brief description

The historic centre of Agadez dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the Sultanate of Aïr was established there, encouraging the consolidation of Tuareg tribes and the development of trans-Saharan economic and cultural exchanges. The process of sedentarisation respected the old encampment boundaries, giving rise to an original street pattern which is still respected today. The historic centre contains a considerable number of dwellings, and a well-preserved group of palatial and religious buildings, including a lofty minaret made entirely of mudbrick. It reflects the vernacular mudbrick architecture and decorative style specific to the Aïr region. The traditional sultanate system is still in place, supporting social unity and economic prosperity.

### Category of property

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

## 1 Basic data

### Included in the Tentative List

26 May 2006

### International assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

2002

### Date received by the World Heritage Centre

31 January 2012

### Background

This is a new nomination.

### Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committees on Earthen Architectural Heritage (ISCEAH), and on Historic Towns and Villages (CIVVIH).

### Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the property from 22 to 30 September 2012.

### Additional information requested and received from the State Party

On 29 October 2012, ICOMOS asked the State Party for additional information about the inventories currently under way, and for a more thorough comparative analysis with regard to the urban fabric and the specific style of the housing. It also sent a letter on 21 December 2012 concerning: the implementation of the urban development plan, the implementation of the inventory of the property, the stipulation of conservation standards, the role of the Local Management Committee, and a description of monitoring initiatives. The State Party responded by sending additional documents on 26 November 2012 and on 25 February 2013, which have been taken into account in this evaluation.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

6 March 2013

## 2 The property

### Description

The city of Agadez is located on the south-eastern fringes of the Sahara desert, at the southern end of the Aïr Massif. From a very early date it became an essential staging post on the western trans-Saharan route linking the Maghreb (Eastern Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) to the Sahel region between the loop of the Niger River and Lake Chad. In the collective imagination, it is seen as a "gateway to the desert", which reflects its strategic role as a commercial crossroads. It also formed part of the Saharan "Salt Route" leading towards the Sahel in Africa. Today it is the largest city in the region, and the capital of the northern and north-eastern part of the Republic of Niger.

The historic town of Agadez forms the centre of the present-day city, which has spread out into the surrounding area. It comprises 11 quarters with irregular shapes, which bear witness to the boundaries of the encampments of the Tuareg tribes as they were when the process of sedentarisation began. These quarters today still form the administrative fabric of the historic centre. A major north-south thoroughfare, created during the period of colonisation, divides it into two parts. The quarters are as follows: *Katanga* (quarter of the ramparts and the Sultan's Palace); *Amarewat* (potters' quarter); *Amdit* (quarter of the Igdalen Tuaregs); *Imourdan-Magass*, *Imourdan-Nafala* and *Akanfaya* (Kel Away Tuaregs); *Oungoual-Bayi* (quarter of the servants); *Agar-garin-saka* (square of the caravans); *Founé-Imé*; *Obitara* (the exterior market and the craftspeople); *Hougoubéré* (the former commercial centre of the grand market *Tamallakoye*).

The earliest built heritage in Agadez dates from the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. Other construction works followed, up to the building of houses for rich traders until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The old town contains many traditional houses, which are arranged around an internal courtyard. They have one or two levels, are between 3 metres and 6

metres high, and have terraced roofs. For protection from the sun, the facades have very few external openings. The main door is often flanked by earthen benches, or *dakali*, which serve as seats and also protect the base of the buildings from erosion. The terrace has a balustrade, often with openwork patterns or decorative crenellations. Along with the entrance door frames, and sometimes buttresses, these elements create a style which characterises the traditional houses of Agadez.

The principal building material is clayey earth (*banco*). It is utilised in the form of conical bricks shaped by hand (*kounkou*) or more recently as rectangular moulded bricks (*tubali*). The bricks are laid using an earth-based mortar, and the walls are also plastered with earth. Trunks of doum or Palmyra palm and mats support the roofs, which are made of the same clayey earth. The earthen arch, and its use in crossed arches, were developed by the Haoussas, the founders of the art of construction at Agadez; these allow the construction of earthen vaults and cupolas.

The traditional house has an entrance vestibule (*zauré*). This room is used to receive visitors, for cooking-related activities (pounding of wheat or millet), or for the production and sale of handicraft products. The house is arranged around the main courtyard, which facilitates the lighting and aeration of all the rooms. The courtyard is the venue for everyday activities, giving access to the surrounding rooms and to the terraces and to the upper floor (if any). The interior rooms may be richly decorated with geometrical patterns, both stylised or symbolic.

The historic centre includes a group of 18 major sites: the Grand Mosque, the Palace of the Sultan of Aïr, the Squares of Toundoun, Kofar Sarki, the Chérifiens and the night market, the Residence of the Sultan Almoumine, the Mosques of Tendé, Abawagé and El Hadji Bianou, the Qadi's House, the Palace of the Anastafidet, the Houses of Sidi Kâ, Ati Sarkin Fawa and Mahadi, the Hotel de l'Aïr, the Restaurant Le Piliier and the ancient Square of Tamallakoye. Amongst this group, the following are the most noteworthy monuments and sites:

- The Palace of the Sultan of Aïr dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the sultan settled in Agadez. The residence of the sultan's family and the seat of government, the palace is still in use. It comprises a large number of buildings arranged around courtyards. Protected by a perimeter wall, it has an area of 1.2 ha. The main building is on three levels. With the minaret, it forms an impressive group of monuments on the city's skyline. The palace has two main entrances: one in the north-east for the administrative buildings and the sultan's living quarters, and one in the west for ceremonial purposes. The palace has various annexes, in the northern part, and areas originally used to keep horses and camels, which are today car parks. In the south, the palace is linked to the Grand Mosque by a special access way, reserved for the sultan.
- The Grand Mosque of Agadez took on its general present-day appearance in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. It is

located in the north-west of the old town, next to the Sultan's Palace. This highly symbolic monument is still used for main Friday prayers. Its 27 metre tall minaret is in the form of a truncated pyramid. The minaret is made entirely of mudbrick, and its surface is covered with projecting wooden stakes used as permanent supports for scaffolding. The Sudanese-style minaret is held to be the tallest minaret ever built entirely out of mudbrick, which is its distinctive feature. It has an interior spiral staircase. The minaret is an emblematic monument in Niger, and is the focal point of the city's panorama. The mosque and its dependencies, which include two oratories, a tomb and various courtyards and cemeteries, are surrounded by walls. The group of buildings occupies an area of 5600 sq.m. It was extended at various periods, respecting the traditional techniques and materials, in particular a partial reconstruction of the minaret in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and new prayer rooms in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

- Two other mosques in the old town date from the 16<sup>th</sup> century: the Tendé Mosque, with its two decorated monumental central pillars, and the Abawagé Mosque, which is still used. These two mosques have no minaret.
- The Qadi's House dates from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has a large vestibule which opens on to the outside, where legal judgments are delivered.
- The Palace of the Anastafidet dates from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This represents the chieftancy of a group of Tuaregs who played a leading role in the management of caravans. The palace has some twenty rooms and several courtyards, arranged around a large reception room, covered by a ribbed vault.
- The House of Sidi Kâ, or Baker's House, is a building with an upper floor and dates from 1917. It was richly decorated, in a style reflecting a mixture of cultural influences, by its designer, the merchant himself.
- The former residence of the Sultan Almoumine is still inhabited by his descendants; this is a place to stay for the future brides of the sultan's house.
- The house and butcher's shop of Ati Sarkin Fawa are two noteworthy buildings dating from 1959.
- The Hotel de l'Aïr is a palace built in 1917 for Kaossen, the leader of the rebellion against the colonial power. It was later converted into a hotel. The hotel restaurant has remarkable ribbed vaults, supported by four large pillars.

### History and development

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the first occupants to settle on the site of Agadez were the Haoussas, who came from the south. The site had springs whose water came from the foothills of the Aïr Massif. The Haoussas took up Islam, but retained some animistic traditions. Using local materials, they developed a refined art of construction using mudbrick, which was to be continued by their Berber, and later Tuareg, successors.

The Sultanate of Aïr was created by the Tuaregs in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century. It succeeded in establishing pre-eminence in the South-eastern Sahara by controlling the caravan trade. The Sultanate established itself at Agadez from the reign of Iisawan (1430-1449) onwards. The sedentarisation of the various nomadic Tuareg tribes then

began, giving rise to the old town which exists today, which became their capital. It was a great centre for the caravan trade, and a meeting point between traders and the Muslim intellectual elites.

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the power of the sultanate was strengthened, and this led to the embellishment of the town. The Grand Mosque was, after several tries, provided with an outstanding minaret by Zakaria, a sheikh who is still revered for his building prowess. It was during this period that the links between the mosque and the sultan's palace were strengthened, giving tangible expression to a power structure that was at once temporal and spiritual. Zakaria built two other mosques in the old town of Agadez. The 16<sup>th</sup> century was notable for the conflicts with the Songhai empire and the Berber kingdom of Takedda. In the West, Agadez was known through the written description of Leo Africanus (1526).

The town's development was hampered by difficulties which arose at various periods, including an epidemic (1687-89), and an invasion by a rival Tuareg group, the Kel Away (1740). Frequent conflicts between the various Tuareg tribes gave rise to a lasting sense of insecurity, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The preservation of the built heritage, including the minaret and the mosque, suffered as a result.

French troops took control of Agadez in 1904. They were then in turn threatened by the Kaossen revolt, supported by the Sultan of Aïr (1916-17). The sultanate was temporarily impoverished, but it rapidly re-established itself, as it acted as an intermediate power between the nomadic tribes of the region, and as the guarantor of commercial activities.

When independence came in 1960, the Sultanate of Aïr was maintained, keeping an important socio-political role in the town of Agadez and the Aïr region. Today the sultanate is regarded as a factor for security and social peace, a conciliatory power and a moral authority. In the early 1980s, the extraction of uranium in the Sahara, and the opening of the asphalted Niamey – Arlit road gave the city a new impetus.

The population of Agadez reflects a melting-pot between the "sultan's people" (the main group of inhabitants, descended from the Tuareg tribes and their slaves), and foreign merchants, usually of Arab origin.

The sultan's people comprise the sultan's family, and the descendants of the various socio-cultural groups directly linked to the history of the sultanate. In addition to the sultan himself, the sultan has followers such as the *Dangaladima* or vice-sultan, the *Tourawa*, a qadi in charge of justice, the *Magagia*, the sultan's sister, who is in charge of women's issues, and the sultan's secretary, etc. This social group includes the prominent figures and administrators of the sultanate, of various ranks, such as the head of military functions, and the *Dogaris* in charge of the police, etc. The imam is responsible for religious matters, assisted by the *Madaha* and by marabouts. The

sultan's people also exercise the main economic and commercial responsibilities: the organisation of markets and the butchery; the *Serki Guina* is the head of the master masons, etc. The *gontos* are the neighbourhood chiefs, who act as intermediaries between the sultan and the local residents. The "ritual parade of the sultan" each year – in which the sultan is accompanied by his prominent officials – symbolises the long existence of the sultanate as an institution. The parade processes throughout the city, beginning from the palace and mosque, and a series of codified stops are made, where the sultan addresses the population, invoking the benefits of peace, security and prosperity ensured by the sultanate.

There are a large number of squares in the various quarters. The largest squares were used for commercial purposes, or were used for holding camels. Other squares were used for celebrations and weddings, for social exchanges and traditional games. Finally, the peripheral squares were transformed into temporary ponds during the rainy season.

The building of the house is the work of the master mason, the *maghalami*, i.e. the "educated man", who designs the plan and who then directs the construction work. The construction of a house is accompanied by religious rites from the start of the works until the end, and again once the house is inhabited. The traditional urban house is not only characterised by its architecture, its decoration and its furniture, but also by its significance in terms of the family. It is the cradle of the family, where the parents have been born, and where the main events in the lives of the different generations are played out. The house is considered as a common property for the whole of the enlarged family.

The regular replastering of the minaret is a maintenance operation conducted by the master mason, under the direct responsibility of the sultan. It has a ritual significance, and the masons are assisted by students from the Koranic schools.

An important caravan centre and staging post, Agadez developed from an early date a highly diversified range of handicrafts, for tools, hardware, arms, pottery, saddlery and bridles, jewellery, etc. The jewellery is emblematic of the town, and includes the celebrated Agadez cross. A great deal of handicraft activity continues today in some quarters, making use of local materials: *Amarewat* for pottery, *Obitara* for the making of leather boxes for incense, and others for their commercial functions, such as *Tamallakoye*, the square of the former grand market.

The music, singing and dances reflect mutual influences between traditions from the various communities which made up the city. The songs refer to love, honour, politics and feats of warfare. They remain very popular and they are supported by the use of many traditional instruments, made using techniques specific to the region.

### 3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

#### Comparative analysis

The geographical area around the meeting point between the Southern Sahara and the Sahel has seen the development of some remarkable staging towns from the 14<sup>th</sup> century onwards. They give tangible expression to economic movements which are often of vital importance (salt, slaves, gold, etc.), via trans-Saharan caravans; they are also closely linked to important cultural and religious exchanges, as a result of the spread of Islam. They became major spiritual and intellectual centres, and thus centres of power.

Several towns of this type, or their monuments, have already been inscribed on the World Heritage List. There are notable similarities between them and Agadez, particularly because of historical parallels and similar socio-economic functions, but each one has its differences and specific features. The sites concerned include the Ancient *Ksour* of Ouadane, Chinguetti, Tichitt and Oualata, in Mauritania (inscribed in 1996, criteria (iii) (iv) and (v)), where however stone construction techniques are used.

In Mali, it is important to note the unity of use of mudbrick, as in Agadez; this has led to the formation of a homogeneous Sub-Saharan cultural zone in terms of construction techniques, with considerable similarities of use and application. Timbuktu (1988, (ii) (iv) and (v)) played a major role in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries as an intellectual centre and a pivotal role in the spread of Islam in Western Africa; its town planning is relatively similar to that of Agadez, although the latter stands out because of the shape of its minaret, its original decorative motifs and the use of ribbed vaults. The Tomb of Askia at Gao (2004, (ii) (iii) and (iv)) bears witness to the power and wealth of the Songhai empire from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The Old Towns of Djenné (1988, (iii) and (iv)) embody, as in the case of Timbuktu, urban development which is broadly similar to that of Agadez.

In the State Party's view, the originality of the development of Agadez stems primarily from the role played there by the Sultanate, which – in heritage terms – is reflected in the presence of the Sultan's Palace, which is closely associated with the Grand Mosque. Secondly, the original street layout, which is quite different from the hierarchical street system found in traditional Arab-Islamic towns, is linked to the Tuareg origins of the town, reflected in an urban layout comprising broader streets with many small squares. Furthermore, the continuous use of mudbrick, since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, has resulted in a remarkable level of knowhow which is reflected in the height of the minaret, held to be the tallest ever erected in the world exclusively with the aid of this construction technique. Finally, Agadez bears witness to an architecture which is specific to the Air region.

ICOMOS considers that the response of the State Party in the additional documentation of November 2012 only

partly answers the questions regarding the need for a more thorough comparative study. The four points which are held to constitute the Outstanding Universal Value of Agadez seem to be both coherent and logical, but they need to be established on a more solid footing, and not simply stated as established facts. The emphasis placed on the minaret is based mainly on height comparisons and not on stylistic aspects, but stylistic issues must be considered in addition to the undeniable originality of a structure made entirely of mudbrick. It would be advisable to extend the comparative study to include many other architectural and decorative aspects of the property, in order to thoroughly examine the originality of a style which is specific to Agadez and the surrounding region. To this end, it is necessary to consider the examples mentioned in more detail, and to make an enlarged comparison to include other towns in Saharan desert regions, particularly those which embody long traditions of mudbrick use, such as the Old Town of Ghadamès (Libya, 1986, (v)); M'Zab Valley (Algeria, 1982, (ii) (iii) (v)); and the Ksar of Ait-Ben-Haddou (Morocco, 1987, (iv) (v)). Comparisons relating to urban fabric and vernacular architecture can also be made with the Medina of Marrakesh (Morocco, 1985, (i) (ii) (iv) (v)). Other old towns and monuments of a similar type, which are currently on the Tentative Lists of the various States' Parties, could also be considered, starting with Niger itself with the Old Town of Zinder and the Palace of the Zamakoyé of Dosso; or the cultural Salt Route project which includes Agadez. Architectural influences from the south (Southern Niger and Northern Nigeria) should also be taken into consideration.

Finally, other cultural zones where mudbrick is traditionally used for construction could also be considered, such as Asante Traditional Buildings (Ghana, 1980, (v)); the At-Turaif District in ad-Dir'iyah (Saudi Arabia, 2010, (iv) (v) (vi)); Bam and its Cultural Landscape (Iran, 2004, (ii) (iii) (iv) (v)); and urban centres in Yemen such as the Old Walled City of Shibam (1982, (iii) (iv) (v)), and the Old City of Sana'a (1986, (iv) (v) (vi)).

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ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis presented, despite some shortcomings, justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

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#### 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 urban structure of Agadez reflects the original history of its foundation, based on the sultanate and the peaceful consolidation of various Tuareg populations, whose initial encampments were later transformed into quarters.
- This has given rise to an original irregular street layout, with wide streets, and a large number of intermediate squares and small squares between the quarters.
- A staging town for trans-Saharan caravans and an important trading centre, its wealth gave rise to a

richly decorated and original vernacular architecture, constituting a style which is specific to Agadez and the Air region.

- Agadez has the world's tallest minaret made entirely of mudbrick.
- The group of monuments, the urban fabric and the architecture bear witness to a lifestyle based on making the best use of local resources; the property is fully adapted to its environment and to the climate.
- The Grand Mosque, the Sultan's Palace, the Qadi's House and a large number of public buildings are still living places today, and continue to play an important role in the inhabitants' daily lives, which perpetuates the traditional culture of peace and prosperity built up by the Sultanate of Air over the last five centuries.

ICOMOS considers that Agadez constitutes a vast and well-preserved historic urban ensemble, which uses mudbrick architecture both for its monuments, which in some cases are extremely impressive, such as the great minaret, and for its housing. Its original street layout stems directly from the settling down of Tuareg tribes in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The town displays an original architectural and decorative style, with mudbrick arches, and inspirations from a great variety of sources and periods. It is a living historic urban centre, still supported by its traditional organisational structure, as a result of the institutional and spiritual presence of the Sultanate of Air.

### **Integrity and authenticity**

#### **Integrity**

The boundaries of the nominated property are those of the historic centre, whose specific urban planning contrasts sharply with the other parts of the town, which were developed at a later date and are of less interest. The overall urban fabric has been well preserved, and is spatially organised around politico-religious monuments put in place by the Sultanate of Air. The ensemble formed by the Sultan's Palace, the Grand Mosque and the minaret is well complete, well preserved and satisfactorily maintained, allowing the expression of a social and religious tradition which is still alive today.

A significant number of houses, representing well over half the total, have been preserved inside the property, allowing the satisfactory expression of the specific values linked to mudbrick architecture and decoration specific to the Air region.

The nominated property has good visual unity, from numerous observation points, and generates for the visitor the sense of a truly historic town. There are however some localised major alterations which impair this visual integrity: inappropriate breeze block buildings, particularly along the main shopping street and next to the new market, the use of corrugated iron roofs, an overhead electricity supply network which is particularly visible and unsightly, and finally, the appearance of large advertisements painted on walls.

#### **Authenticity**

The urban layout, consisting of irregular streets which are relatively wide, and open spaces (squares and small squares), still conforms to its historic origins, with the exception of the main shopping street along a north-south axis, created in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This urban layout is in stark contrast to the rest of the town, which is of modern design with a regular grid pattern.

The historic centre consists almost exclusively of traditional mudbrick constructions, for monuments, palaces and housing. The spatial organisation, form and techniques of present-day construction are still based on the principles of traditional mudbrick architecture. It is necessary to note however that modern building materials and cement-based plasters have begun to appear. This phenomenon remains limited, except in the main shopping street.

The windows and doors, traditionally made of doum or Palmyra palm wood, are being systematically replaced by metal windows and doors. This is a general trend, and applies also to monuments such as the Grand Mosque and the Sultan's Palace.

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ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met, despite various undesirable alterations, which should be limited by active protection and appropriate conservation.

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#### **Criteria under which inscription is proposed**

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

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

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the construction of the minaret of the Agadez mosque dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. With a height of 27 metres, the minaret is the tallest construction in the world with a load-bearing structure exclusively made of mudbrick (foundations, walls and plastering). This remarkable technical achievement was the result of a long process of experimentation. The minaret is attributed to Sheikh Zakharia, who has thus become one of the city's most venerated figures.

ICOMOS considers that the height of the minaret is indeed a remarkable technical achievement, bearing testimony to considerable expertise in the use of mudbrick. However, the stylistic elements and the ensemble formed by the minaret, the mosque and its dependencies do not in themselves, or as a complete monumental ensemble, attain the level of a unique masterpiece. The arguments put forward correspond more closely to criterion (iii) than to criterion (i).

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

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*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 Agadez, situated in the southern Sahara, became as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century an important place for commercial, technical, artistic and religious interchanges, and gave rise to a unique urban pattern, the result of the gradual development of a true lifestyle, in harmony with the town's cultural and natural setting.

ICOMOS considers that since the 15<sup>th</sup> century Agadez, the "gateway to the desert", has been a noteworthy crossroads of the caravan trade. It bears witness to a historic old town, forming a major centre for trans-Saharan cultural interchange. Its architecture reflects a synthesis of stylistic influences in the setting of an original urban ensemble, made entirely from mudbrick, and specific to the Air region.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

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

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Agadez bears witness to a determination to establish a commercial town "at the gateway to the desert", based on a policy of peace and hospitality established by the Sultanate of Air, created in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

ICOMOS considers that the historic town and its noteworthy monumental ensembles, particularly the Grand Mosque, its minaret (the tallest ever constructed in mudbrick) and the Sultan's Palace, bear witness to an exceptional tradition based on the sophisticated use of mudbrick architecture. Over more than five centuries, the town has developed a cultural, commercial and handicraft tradition based on the continuity of the Sultanate of Air, right up to the present day.

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ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

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ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met, and that criteria (ii) and (iii) have been justified.

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#### **4 Factors affecting the property**

The historic centre of Agadez is a living urban site with a population of approximately 20,000 people. Today it is confronted by the aspirations of the residential population for an improvement in living conditions, and the simultaneous influences of modernity and poverty. However the urban expansion of Agadez (which is still

limited) has primarily been focused on the outskirts of the town, and up to now impact on the historic centre has been relatively slight. Population pressure remains moderate.

As already indicated, development pressure is leading to the introduction of modern building materials (cement, breezeblocks, metal, corrugated iron, etc.) in the old buildings. The impulse to build additional floors is also starting to appear. At present this tendency remains essentially limited to the main shopping street and to the area around the new market. The replacement of windows however is becoming systematic, and the use of cement-based plaster is tending to grow, which adversely affects authenticity and could have serious consequences in the medium-term on the conservation of the mudbrick buildings.

In the shopping districts, pressure from large advertisements, in aggressive colours, painted on the walls, is now appearing, in a way that is both garish and unsightly. This tendency, like the use of cement-based plaster, could also have an impact on the conservation of the traditional buildings.

In the buffer zone, in areas immediately adjacent to the property, service buildings and shops have been built in a modern architectural style which is extremely jarring, compared with the vernacular architecture of the property.

Tourism in Agadez is embryonic at present, and has been held back by the regional conflicts of recent years. Agadez is a transit town, in the past for caravan traffic and today for road traffic. While the traffic does not directly affect the historic centre, pressure from road traffic and parking is beginning to emerge, and this could grow in the future, particularly if there is a revival of tourism.

There have been no major natural disasters in the history of Agadez. The only destruction which has taken place has been of human origin, caused by conflicts.

Generally speaking, the town's pollution level is low. Vehicles driven in the town raise a fine dust, but this does not have any particular negative impact on buildings. The impact of dust is far more intense during sandstorms, but in fact their effects seem to be beneficial for the conservation of mudbrick buildings, as they deposit a fine coating of mineral particles on the surfaces.

Rainfall is rare, but can be violent when it occurs. For the property, which is on slightly elevated land, the natural slope drains the water away, but subsequently the water stagnates on the perimeter of the property and in the streets of the buffer zone, which can affect the buildings' foundations. It seems that climate change is tending to increase the occurrence of exceptional rainfall events.

The supply of drinking water sometimes leads to the discharge of waste water directly into the street, if there is no sump or septic tank.

Difficulties are arising in the supply of traditional woods for roofs and timber frames, because of the growing rarity of certain wood species in the region, and termite attacks, and these factors partly explain the use of metal for door and window frames.

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ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are urban development which is insufficiently controlled in terms of inappropriate constructions, the use of unsuitable materials and the presence of large advertisements in aggressive colours. The general question of sanitation requires action both from a technical and health viewpoint. Particular attention should be paid to the question of traditional species of wood.

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## **5 Protection, conservation and management**

### **Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone**

The property has an area of 77.6 ha; the population is around 19,500 (2011); this number is considered to be stable at the present time.

The buffer zone has an area of 98.1 ha and a population of about 8000 people (2011). This number is also considered to be stable.

Public thoroughfares provide a material expression of the boundaries of the property and the buffer zone.

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ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property and the buffer zone are adequate.

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### **Ownership**

There is no land registry in Agadez. In the old town, family property rights remain customary rights which were formerly guaranteed by the sultanate. With few exceptions, properties are joint possessions which are bequeathed from generation to generation. The attachment of the residents to tradition and to the sultan's authority ensures the smooth operation of the ownership system, and limits land disputes.

Property transactions are rare, but are possible, through a deed delivered by the neighbourhood chief, under the control of the sultan. The deed is recognised by the municipal departments and by the regional town planning directorate, and can thus where necessary be transcribed into documents to meet modern legal requirements.

### **Protection**

The acts, decrees and regulatory texts concern heritage protection and the regulation of urban planning:

- Act 022 of 30 June 1997 concerns the protection and conservation of the national cultural heritage.
- Act 03 of 30 April 2008 concerns town planning and land development; it is amended and augmented by Order

54 of 17 September 2010, instituting the General Code of the Territorial Authorities of the Republic of Niger.

- With the written approval of the Sultan, the old town of Agadez was designated as national cultural heritage in February 2011.
- Decree 87 of December 2011 institutes the town planning regulations applicable to the designated zone of the Old Town of Agadez and its buffer zone.

The acts and regulations that protect the old town of Agadez come under the remit of various ministries (Youth and Culture, Town Planning and Sanitation, Tourism and Handicrafts). Their local application is carried out under the authority of the Municipality of Agadez and the customary law of the Sultanate of Aïr.

The town planning regulations that apply to the property and the buffer zone are the responsibility of the municipality, assisted by CECOGAZ (Old Town of Agadez Conservation and Management Unit). The regulations cover the control and authorisation of all construction and works inside the property boundaries. They limit the height of structures in the buffer zone to a maximum of eight metres, in order to conserve the integrity of the urban landscape.

As in most Sub-Saharan African countries, modern law co-exists with customary law, which is embodied in Agadez by the sultan. In the Old Town, customary law takes precedence, and this is recognised by the various central and local administrations. The sultan, assisted by the neighbourhood chiefs, applies the customary rules and settles any disputes. Furthermore, the residents of the Old Town are strongly attached to the various monuments with religious and customary significance, which helps to protect them.

Town planning regulations were recently introduced, and seem to constitute an appropriate tool. The building permit procedure was set out in detail in a reply from the State Party in February 2013. Permits are issued by the Municipality of Agadez, in accordance with existing legal procedures. The examination of a building permit in terms of conformity with the conservation of the property involves not only the local town planning department, but also the neighbourhood committees, which are already in place, and CECOGAZ, which states its reasoned opinions. To meet the needs of residents, in terms of information and understanding the values of the property, public meetings are organised by the administrative authorities (CECOGAZ) and the customary authorities. A simplified building permit procedure will be considered for the future management of the property, in cases in which no particular problem arises, in order to facilitate the proceedings for the residents.

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ICOMOS considers that the legal protection in place is adequate, and that its practical implementation through the town planning scheme, in concert with the local population, is important. The first consideration for building permits must be the conservation of the property.

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### **Conservation**

At the moment there is no general inventory of the site. There are plans to draw up an inventory under the aegis of the CECOGAZ management unit. Following the identification of human resources and the structures required for an inventory of the buildings, the work has just begun with a preliminary survey of the most significant elements of the property (January 2013). The initiative is financed by the Ministry; it also encompasses an inventory of written data and the recording of customs and cultural practices. Furthermore, knowhow about traditional construction practices, and its transmission to the younger generation are essential for the sustainable conservation of the property. Knowledge of these practices, notably the use of mudbrick, are still widespread in the population today.

The property's state of conservation is generally relatively good. The religious monuments and the palaces are well maintained, under the responsibility of the sultan or the neighbourhood chiefs. In the case of the housing, the situation is more variable. While many houses are in a satisfactory condition, some are facing great problems, such as the Maison Sidi Kâ, even though it is one of the most outstanding examples of the architecture of Agadez. In view of the growing tendency, mentioned earlier, to use inappropriate new materials, an initiative has been taken to raise the awareness of residents. It is supported by a priority programme (early 2013) for the replacement of inappropriate door and window frames in the Sultan's Palace and the Grand Mosque.

The maintenance of the buildings consists of regularly replastering the mudbrick with earth. This takes place at the end of the rainy season, and the practice is still carried out. The Grand Mosque and its minaret, which have permanent scaffolding supports, are regularly maintained, and the earth plastering is renewed at intervals of between 5 and 8 years. The task takes about one month to complete.

The town planning regulations are the main tool for controlling inappropriate constructions and alterations. Although introduced relatively recently, the regulations seem to be an appropriate tool for the conservation and restoration of the authenticity of the buildings. It is planned that the regulations should be supplemented (in 2014) by detailed technical guidelines for the conservation of the property and its visual integrity, and that the population should be informed about them in a way that is both understandable and educational.

It is important to note that the various authorities in place are capable of taking action to preserve the property's visual integrity, as for example in 2011, when a particularly

jarring metal telecommunications tower inside the town was demolished.

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ICOMOS considers that the current state of conservation of the property is satisfactory, and that the State Party should be encouraged in its efforts to:

- Carry out the proposed inventory of the built heritage,
  - Formulate restoration standards which are appropriate for the conservation of the property's authenticity,
  - Introduce procedures for engaging with the population and for raising people's awareness of the importance of conservation of the property,
  - Strengthening the process of transmitting knowhow about traditional construction practices to the younger generation.
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### **Management**

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The property management process leads out of a series of practices and institutional balances that are based on three levels of authority:

- The State intervenes through the Ministry for Culture and its Cultural Heritage Department,
- The Municipality of Agadez intervenes in its fields of responsibility for town planning, hygiene and sanitation;
- Customary law is particularly active in the Old Town of Agadez, via the sultanate system. The sultanate is a moral authority whose influence on local populations is still strong. Accordingly, it acts as a lever supporting the modern administrations, and provides an opportunity for effective application of the traditional protection of the property.

Several management structures co-exist. Their respective roles have been partly clarified by the response provided in the additional documentation from the State Party (November 2012):

- The *Local management committee of the Old town of Agadez* has supervised the property nomination dossier;
- CECOGAZ (*Old Town of Agadez Conservation and Management Unit*) was instituted in January 2012 and recently moved into temporary premises. Its efforts are focused on the technical management of the property and on the examination of building permit applications. At present it is attached to the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, but it should ultimately become an autonomous public institution, and is also presented as an overarching body linking the Municipality of Agadez and the Sultanate. The Unit's director has been appointed, but at present the unit's human resources come from the Regional Town Planning Department and the Technical Departments of the municipality.



- The *Management Committee* has taken over the role of the Local Committee; its role is to supervise and control the operational structure (CECOGAZ).

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

There is a *Development plan for the Agadez region*. Within this framework, the Municipality of Agadez has drawn up a *Communal Development Plan* which is to come into force in 2012. Two aspects of the plan are related to the property: a general water supply plan for the Old Town, and an initiative to promote handicrafts and tourism.

A *Management plan* for the property has been drawn up for the period 2012-2018. The plan has the following components:

- Ensuring the full setting up of CECOGAZ, the property's conservation and management unit,
- Definitive introduction of the building and alteration permit regulations,
- Drawing up the inventory of the property,
- Setting up a programme to restore the property's authenticity, by reducing the use of corrugated iron and cement-based plasters, and by controlling the colours of facades, etc.,
- With regard to houses: encouraging and providing guidance for maintenance work, making sure it complies with authenticity requirements,
- Making sure that traditional materials are available for conservation and restoration work,
- Introducing monitoring of the conservation of the property,
- Considering the possibility of an archaeological programme,
- Improving rainwater drainage,
- Organising tourist visits to the site's main points of interest, etc.

The Management Plan is supplemented by an Action Plan, which consists of a relatively detailed schedule of the interventions to be performed and the bodies responsible for each intervention.

The technical competencies come firstly from the staff of the Cultural Heritage Department assigned to the Agadez region, secondly from the services of the Municipality of Agadez, and thirdly from the town's corporation of mudbrick masons, which maintains traditional technical knowhow and ensures its transmission. The director of CECOGAZ has been appointed: he is a heritage conservation professional.

The property can also take advantage of the technical support of the internationally renowned earthen architecture laboratory in Grenoble, CRATerre-ENSAG.

The funding comes from the following sources:

- Various ministerial departments involved in the management of the property (cultural heritage, town planning and housing, tourism and handicrafts), for a sum totalling CFA 13 million,
- The municipal budget of Agadez, for a sum totalling CFA 5.5 million, for the maintenance of the property by its technical services (household waste disposal, sanitation, roads),
- Private investments made for maintenance and restoration works, for monumental structures and palaces which are the responsibility of the sultan, and for housing by residents,
- CECOGAZ should for its part be granted an annual budget of CFA 15 million from government funds.

Involvement of the local communities

This involvement is substantial, through the role played by the Municipality of Agadez, and by the traditional institution of the customary law of the Sultanate, together with the announced setting up of neighbourhood committees in the future. It is important however that the committees should be fully involved in engagement with the local populations, so as to improve awareness of the property's values, and of the resulting requirements in conservation terms.

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ICOMOS considers that the management system and the Management Plan are just being put in place, and that the World Heritage Committee should be kept informed about their progress. The human resources and the financial means of CECOGAZ also need to be confirmed.

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## 6 Monitoring

Three groups of monitoring indicators are stated: conservation of the property's environment (15 indicators), conservation of knowhow (5 indicators) and conservation of tradition and intangible heritage (6 indicators).

The Management Plan is based on applying the SWOT method in the evaluation and monitoring of the property. The Ministry for Culture carries out monitoring, and an annual evaluation of the indicators of the property. In practice, this means that the management authority (CECOGAZ) carries out a technical inspection of the Old Town each month, and the inspection's findings are examined by the Management Committee.

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ICOMOS considers that the monitoring of the property will be operational once the Management Unit (CECOGAZ) has been physically set up. The monitoring must describe in a unified and practical way the stated indicators and how they are used.

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## 7 Conclusions

ICOMOS recognises the Outstanding Universal Value of the Historic Centre of Agadez. It has an original urban plan, stemming from the sedentarisation of the 15<sup>th</sup> century nomad camps, following the choice of Agadez as the residence of the Sultanate of Aïr. It has an ensemble of dwellings and monuments which reflect a high degree of expertise in the use of mudbrick and local materials. It bears witness to the continuity of a type of urban development which has been well preserved right up to the present day, and to a lifestyle based on ancient cultural traditions which are still alive today. The town displays an original architectural and decorative style, featuring mudbrick arches and decorative styles originating from highly diverse sources and periods. It is a living historic urban centre, still supported by a traditional organisational structure, the institutional and spiritual presence of the Sultanate of Aïr.

## 8 Recommendations

### Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the Historic Centre of Agadez, Niger, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (ii) and (iii)**.

### Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

#### Brief synthesis

The historic centre of Agadez dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the Sultanate of Aïr established itself there, encouraging the consolidation of Tuareg tribes and the development of trans-Saharan economic and cultural exchanges. Sedentarisation took place based around the former encampments, which led to an original street plan, which is still respected today. The historic centre includes a large amount of housing, and a well preserved palatial and religious ensemble, including a tall minaret made entirely of mudbrick. The old town is characterised by mudbrick architecture and a decorative style that are specific to the Aïr region. The traditional sultanate system is still in place, ensuring social unity and economic prosperity. It is a living historic centre inhabited by about 20,000 people.

**Criterion (ii):** From the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Agadez, “the gateway to the desert”, became an exceptional crossroads for the caravan trade. It bears witness to an early historic town, forming a major centre for trans-Saharan cultural interchanges. Its architecture embodies a synthesis of stylistic influences in an original urban ensemble, made entirely of mudbrick and which is specific to the Aïr region.

**Criterion (iii):** The historic town and its outstanding monumental ensemble, including the Grand Mosque, with its minaret, the tallest ever constructed in mudbrick, and the Sultan’s Palace, bear witness to an exceptional

architectural tradition, based on sophisticated use of mudbrick. For more than five centuries, the city has developed a cultural, commercial and handicraft tradition, based on the continuity of the Sultanate of Aïr, up to the present day.

#### Integrity

The boundaries of the nominated property are those of the historic centre. The overall urban fabric is well preserved, and is spatially organised around the politico-religious monuments linked to the Sultanate of Aïr. A significant number of houses (easily a majority) have been preserved, which allows the satisfactory expression of the specific values linked to the mudbrick architecture and decoration specific to the Aïr region. The nominated property has good visual unity from many observation points, and gives the visitor the sense of being in an historic town of great integrity. There are however some significant local alterations: inappropriate buildings made of breeze blocks, the use of corrugated iron for roofs, an overhead electricity cable network which is particularly visible and unsightly, and the appearance of large advertisements painted on walls.

#### Authenticity

The authenticity of the component parts of the property is generally satisfactory, particularly for the monuments and palaces, except for the window and door frames, which have often been renewed using non-traditional materials. The authenticity of the housing is good, but it is also threatened by the use of modern materials which do not respect tradition: breeze blocks, cement-based plasters, metal elements and corrugated metal, and the appearance of painted advertisements in aggressive colours.

#### Management and protection requirements

The property is in a good general state of conservation. The religious monuments and palaces are well maintained, under the responsibility of the sultan and of the neighbourhood chiefs. In the case of the houses, the situation is more variable. The property is protected by national legislation and by the traditional local power of the sultanate, with its system of neighbourhood chiefs and committees. Town planning regulations were recently instituted for the property inside the protected perimeter; the building permit regulations must however be implemented in a way that is both homogeneous and educational, so that the population is informed about the values of the property and the maintenance efforts required for its conservation. The putting in place of the Property Conservation and Management Unit must be completed, and the Unit must be provided with sufficient staffing and material resources to carry out its missions. The definition and organisation of the monitoring of the property must be specifically stated.

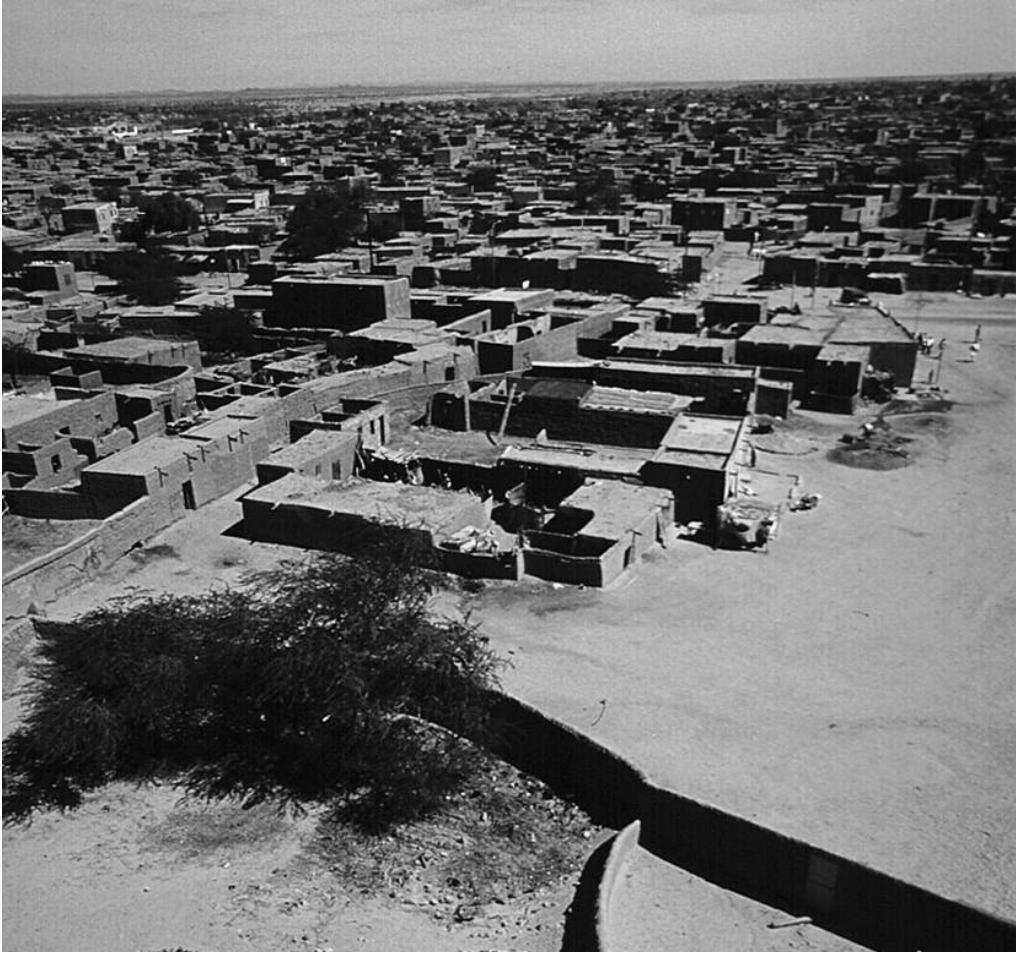
**Additional recommendations**

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

- Continuing working on the inventory of monuments and housing, and on the intangible heritage;
- Establishing restoration standards to ensure the conservation of the authenticity of the property;
- Monitoring the results of the recently introduced policy to ban the use of non-traditional materials for walls, rendering, roofs and the renovation of door and window frames;
- Paying particular attention to the situation of advertisements inside the property and buffer zone limits, and the effectiveness of the measures taken to curb this phenomenon;
- Describing in a unified and practical form the indicators for monitoring the property and the results of their application;
- Submitting by 1<sup>st</sup> February 2014 a report to the World Heritage Centre about the progress made in implementing the above requests and recommendations, to be examined by the Committee at its 38<sup>th</sup> session in 2014;
- Putting in place procedures for engagement with the population and for raising the population's awareness about the conservation of the property;
- Paying particular attention to the transmission of knowhow concerning traditional construction practices;
- Paying particular attention to the question of traditional wood species which are now becoming rare;
- Paying more attention to the question of sanitation in general, both in technical and health terms.



Map showing the boundaries of the nominated property



Panoramic view from the minaret of the Grand Mosque of Agadez



View of the Grand Mosque of Agadez



The Palace of the Sultan of Air



The Hotel de l'Air



Ribbed vault of the Agadez Town Hall