

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

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Charenton-le-Pont, 19 December 2016

H. E. Mr Sophann Ket
Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Cambodia
to UNESCO
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World Heritage List 2017

Sambor Prei Kuk Archaeological Site Representing the Cultural Landscape of Ancient Ishanapura (Cambodia)
– Interim report

Dear Sir,

As prescribed by the revised Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have been requested to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2017. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to "Sambor Prei Kuk Archaeological Site Representing the Cultural Landscape of Ancient Ishanapura" was carried out by Prof Richard Mackay (Australia) from 9 to 16 September 2016. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organization and implementation of the mission.

On 8 August 2016, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information on the following issues: management plan and staffing of the Sambor Prei Kuk National Authority. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 26 August 2016 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2016, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2017. The additional information, together with mission and several expert desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2017.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on 25 November, 2016 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. During the final part of the Panel meeting that followed, the ICOMOS Panel has identified areas where it considers that further information is needed.

While the ICOMOS Panel considered that "Sambor Prei Kuk Archaeological Site Representing the Cultural Landscape of Ancient Ishanapura" might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value, it did not consider that this has yet been fully and clearly demonstrated.

Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider augmenting the documentation already provided in relation to the following points:

Documentation

The archaeological site of Sambor Prei Kuk, identified as Ishanapura, the capital city of the Chenla Empire in the late 6th and early 7th century CE, consists of three zones: the central temple zone, the western habitation zone, and the eastern causeways zone. The nominated property is said to exhibit on a grand scale complex and monumental urban planning and a sophisticated engineered hydraulic system, both of which are put forward as part of its potential Outstanding Universal Value. However, the ICOMOS Panel noted that as the urban layout of the ancient city is currently not visible on the ground, and the archaeological site is composed mostly of ruins dispersed in a forest setting, only traces of the overall layout and planning of city remain and the understanding as to what remains of the overall hydraulic system and how it once functioned, is not clear. Furthermore, the text in the nomination dossier does not describe the city's planning nor the way the fluvial plain is said to have been a 'carefully engineered combination of three hydraulic systems [that] managed and controlled the water'.

It is understood from the nomination dossier that there is insufficient evidence to be able to say with any certainty what form the city had and how water management was organized. Currently we are at a stage of waiting for new techniques and further surveys to supply some of this much needed information on the form of the city, its planning and its engineering systems.

Therefore, the ICOMOS Panel considered that the use of the terms 'Cultural Landscape' in the name of the property could not be said to be entirely appropriate at the present time on the basis of the information so far provided.

ICOMOS would be pleased to receive information on any defined or proposed programme of future archaeological surveys of the property and thus to be able to understand when overall plans and maps might be produced to allow a fuller understanding of the scope and extent of the city and its complex planning and water management. This would be considered as a helpful aide to management and conservation at a landscape scale.

Boundaries

ICOMOS notes that the boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zone are delineated by seemingly arbitrary straight lines. We presume this is because currently the full extent of the city is unknown. However, it would be helpful to understand the rationale for these boundaries.

Conservation

Given the state of conservation of the still standing structures, and the information provided by the Risk Assessment for these monuments, it appears that, for both safety and conservation reasons, protection and conservation are urgently needed. It appears equally crucial that conservation techniques be consistently documented and transmitted to new staff members.

This is clearly an enormous conservation challenge and not one that can be addressed quickly. The helpful extra information that was provided shows the high percentage – some 35% of 291 structures which are in danger of collapse. ICOMOS notes that although conservation work is ongoing on a monument by monument basis, what has not been set out clearly in the nomination dossier is what conservation work has so far been undertaken since the 1990s, nor what sort of programme exists for how this work will be tackled over, say, the next ten or twenty years.

Given the vulnerability of many of the structures, and the likelihood of increased visitor numbers in the future, it would be helpful to understand how and when a Conservation Plan is to be put in place that will give some assurance as to how this massive project will be tackled, over what time frame, and the scale of the resources will need to be identified for this project.

Protection

The legal protection in place is adequate, but it will remain incomplete until the Sub Decree for the use of zones within the Sambor Prei Kuk Region is finalized and implemented. Could the State Party provide ICOMOS with a precise date for finalizing and implementing the Sub Decree for the use of zones within the Sambor Prei Kuk Region?

Management

The main threats to the property are water infiltration in the monuments, heavy rains, fire, looting, and tourism pressure. ICOMOS appreciates all the work that is done by the management team to protect the nominated property from these threats. However, ICOMOS considers that the tourism management, which is based on the parking capacities is inadequate. The tourism management plan should be revised to efficiently take into account the weather conditions, seasonality of tourism activities and the carrying capacity of individual monuments of the nominated property.

More generally, the adoption and implementation of the Comprehensive Management Plan needs to be accomplished as soon as possible, in order to ensure it has binding statutory effect at both national and provincial level.

In the same vein, the National Authority of Sambor Prei Kuk should be accommodated at the entrance of the nominated property.

Possible Roadmap

In bringing together all the above issues on documentation, conservation, management, protection and tourism management, ICOMOS would like to ask whether the State Party might consider developing a roadmap and an implementation calendar that could address all these aspects in a prioritized manner, subject to adequate resources being forthcoming, including from external sources?

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation process.

We would be grateful if you could provide ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre with the above information by **28 February 2017 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the Operational Guidelines for supplementary information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while ICOMOS will carefully consider any supplementary information submitted, it cannot properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or large amounts of new information submitted at the last minute. So we request to keep your response concise and respond only to the above requests.

In the interest of ensuring dialogue with the States Parties, ICOMOS would be ready for a Skype or conference call to clarify any of the above points, or other matters related to the nomination dossier, if that might be considered to be helpful.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation process.

Yours faithfully,



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to Minister of Culture and Fine Arts
 UNESCO World Heritage Centre