

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE
WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

World Heritage Committee
Fifteenth Session

Carthage, Tunisia
9-13 December 1991

Item 13 of the Provisional Agenda: Revisions to the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention - Natural Heritage Criteria

1. It is recalled that the Bureau, at its twelfth session in June 1988, while examining the nomination of the Lesbos Petrified Forest submitted by Greece, recognized that IUCN needed specialist advice to evaluate properties nominated under natural heritage criteria (i) (the earth's evolutionary history) and (ii) (on-going geological processes).

2. The Secretariat contacted UNESCO's International Geological Correlation Programme (IGCP) and the International Union for Geological Sciences (IUGS), to study this matter in depth. A consultant (Dr. J.W. Cowie, Chairman, IUGS Commission on Stratigraphy) was engaged to prepare a preliminary global indicative list of geological and fossil sites. A draft list was compiled by February 1991.

3. During 11-13 February 1991, the Secretariat convened a meeting of a Task Force comprising experts representing several disciplines of the geological sciences and a representative of the IUCN. The meeting aimed at improving the regional balance of the draft list of geological and fossil sites and reviewing the application of natural heritage criteria to geological and fossil sites. Geologists from Australia, Brazil, Canada, the People's Republic of China, Kenya, UK and USSR participated in the meeting.

4. The geologists who participated in the Task Force meeting reviewed the application of natural heritage criteria (i)

and (ii), described under paragraph 36 (a) of the Operational Guidelines, to each site in the draft list. They found criterion (i) to be imprecise and that criterion (ii) reflected geological as well as biological and ecological phenomena. Therefore, the task force redefined criterion (i) to make it more precise and separated the geological aspects of criterion (ii) to define two new criteria. The Task Force also proposed guidelines for assessing the scientific merit of geological and/or fossil sites.

5. The Secretariat took into consideration the recommendations made by the Task Force and presented to the Bureau at its last session held at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, from 17-21 June 1991, a revision of the natural heritage criteria to include the following:

- a) the revised version of criterion (i) as proposed by the Task Force;
- b) two new criteria, proposed by the Task Force and reflecting only geological phenomena and processes;
- c) revisions of current criteria (ii), (iii) and (iv), described under paragraph 36 (a) of the Operational Guidelines, to exclude references to geological phenomena and processes and to those aspects which were incorporated as part of a proposed new cultural heritage criterion on cultural landscapes, and
- d) the guidelines proposed by the Task Force for assessing the scientific merit of geological and/or fossil sites.

The Committee may wish to refer to the Document SC-91/CONF.001/9 in Annex I on the revision of natural heritage criteria which was presented to the Bureau at its last session.

6. The Bureau acknowledged the need to review natural heritage criteria and noted that individual criterion may refer separately to geological, biological, ecological and aesthetic phenomena. The Bureau recommended that the Committee request a revision of natural heritage criteria as one of the outcomes of the evaluation of the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Convention. The Bureau requested the Secretariat and IUCN to co-operate in this regard using information from all available sources, e.g. recommendations of the Task Force of Geologists, IUCN's Oceanic Islands study and specialist networks which work in liaison with IUCN and UNESCO. The Bureau also recommended that the Secretariat and IUCN work together to provide another draft of the revised natural heritage criteria which includes one geological criterion that incorporates all the major features of the three geological criteria proposed by

the Task Force of Geologists who met at UNESCO Headquarters in February 1991.

7. IUCN has contacted several of its specialist networks in order to obtain suggestions for the revision of natural heritage criteria and comments on the recommendations made by the Task Force of Geologists. IUCN will report on the outcome of its consultations on this matter at the time of the Committee meeting.

8. The Secretariat is in contact with specialist networks such as IUGS and will solicit their co-operation in the revision of natural heritage criteria. A special workshop, to be held on the occasion of the Fourth World Parks Congress from 10-21 February 1992, will review some aspects of the implementation of the Convention. The outcome of this review will provide inputs to the overall evaluation of the Convention that is being carried out in connection with the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Convention in 1992.

9. The Committee is requested to consider the revision of natural heritage criteria in the light of the recommendations of the Bureau and the information that will be provided by IUCN at the time of the Committee meeting. The Secretariat and IUCN will draw up proposals for the revision of natural heritage criteria and the conditions of integrity for the consideration of the Bureau at its sixteenth session in 1992. The recommendations of the Bureau will be incorporated and a final draft of the revised natural heritage criteria would be submitted for consideration of the Committee at its sixteenth session during late 1992.