Third State of Conservation Report Addressed by the Republic of Iraq to the World Heritage Committee on

The Ahwar of Southern Iraq: Refuge of Biodiversity and Relict Landscape of the Mesopotamian Cities

World Heritage Property n. 1481

November 2020
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1- REQUESTS BY THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

This report addresses the following requests expressed by World Heritage Committee in its Decision 43 COM 7B.35 (paragraphs 119 – 120), namely:

3. Welcomes the start of conservation work by international archaeological missions at the three cultural components of the property, Ur, Tell Eridu and Uruk, and, the comprehensive survey undertaken at Tell Eridu;

4. Regrets that no progress has been reported on the development of site-specific conservation plans for the three cultural components of the property, as requested by the Committee in response to the significant threats they face related to instability, significant weathering, inappropriate previous interventions, and the lack of continuous maintenance;

5. Urges the State Party to extend the comprehensive survey and mapping to all three cultural components of the property, as baseline data for future work, and to develop operational conservation plans for each as a matter of priority, and to submit these to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies;

6. Appreciates that a study to establish the minimum water flow needed for the natural components of the property has been undertaken, but notes with deep concern that this minimum flow has not been met in the past two years, and reiterates its request to the State Party to provide the natural components of the property with adequate water within its national capacity as a matter of utmost priority;

7. Strongly encourages again the States Parties of Iraq, Iran and Turkey to continue their efforts in cooperating towards long-term sustainable water management, so as to ensure the provision of adequate amounts of water for the natural components of the property to sustain their contribution to its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV);

8. While appreciating that the State Party considers that World Heritage designation provides adequate legal protection to the property, also reiterates its request to the State Party to complete the designation of all of the natural components of the property as protected areas in order to provide effective protection under national legislative and management systems, as required in the Operational Guidelines,

9. Reiterating its previous significant concern over the continued vulnerability of the natural components of the property to oil and gas developments, recalls the Committee’s established position that oil and gas exploration and exploitation are incompatible with World Heritage status, and strongly urges again the State Party to make a permanent commitment to not explore or exploit oil and gas within the property, and to ensure that any such activities outside the property do not cause a negative impact on its OUV;
10. Requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre data concerning illegal bird hunting, overfishing, including the number of prosecutions and convictions from these illegal activities, and to further strengthen its legal protection, enforcement and management capacity to control these activities;

11. Also urges the State Party to prepare an updated Integrated Management Plan for the entire property, and to promote the development of updated Management Plans for each of the components of the property;

12. Also welcomes the measures taken to ensure tourism activities do not damage the property, and further reiterates its request to the State Party to develop and implement an overall tourism plan for the whole property, to regulate visitation, and to ensure visitor safety, and sustainable and adequate tourism practices, infrastructure and facilities;

13. Also requests the State Party to continue to meaningfully engage with the local communities on matters concerning water usage, rights-based approaches to management and for the application of traditional ecological knowledge to any planned new constructions;

14. Also regrets that the joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to the property could not be undertaken yet, and reiterates furthermore its request that the mission takes place as soon as possible;

15. Reminds the State Party about the need to submit to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies, information on any future plans for major restoration or new construction projects that may affect the OUV of the property, in line with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, before making any decisions that would be difficult to reverse;
2- CULTURAL HERITAGE

3. Welcomes the start of conservation work by international archaeological missions at the three cultural components of the property, Ur, Tell Eridu and Uruk, and, the comprehensive survey undertaken at Tell Eridu;

The Iraqi government seeks to achieve partnership with specialized universities, organizations and archeology missions around the world in the field of antiquities conservation, because of the high cultural value it represents for the country. the Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Management Plan for the Ahwar of Southern Iraq as a World Heritage Property expresses its thanks for this welcoming, it confirms Iraq’s commitment to complete the maintenance procedures for the cultural components of the property , as the National Committee looks forward to starting excavation and maintenance of the Eridu site in the earliest time, especially after the completion of the survey work by the Italian Sapienza University mission in Rome.

4. Regrets that no progress has been reported on the development of site-specific conservation plans for the three cultural components of the property, as requested by the Committee in response to the significant threats they face related to instability, significant weathering, inappropriate previous interventions, and the lack of continuous maintenance;

The unstable conditions that Iraq was passing through from 2019 until now have hampered the arrival and regularity of the work of the archaeological missions of the three cultural components as well as the completion of maintenance and surveys. However, their attendance was limited to short and intermittent times and further, a notable progress has been made in some work related to exploration and maintenance in the three sites:

1) Ur site: a cooperation contract was concluded with the Italian organization Orem Organization (UPP organization Iraq) to enhance the protection and sustainable management of Iraqi archaeological sites in accordance with relevant laws, regulations and instructions by providing the necessary human and material resources by the organization to achieve Objectives of the agreement. It was agreed to establish a guidance center for visitors (while ensuring the maintenance of the high exceptional value of the component). This is a step towards maintenance and redevelopment of the archaeological site through facilitating maintenance and restoration activities, enhancing interest in academic research, and improving services for tourists. A wooden corridor with iron bases has also been implemented, linking the paved road to the Lal Mach Temple, passing through the amphitheater tower (Al-Zaqqura) with a distance of 275 meters to support the tourist activity while preserving the archaeological value of the site.

2) Eridu site: In the intention to establish facilities for the infrastructure of the site for the purpose of starting exploration and maintenance works, especially after the completion of the survey work by the Italian University of Sapienza in Rome, but as a result of the country’s current
conditions, excavation work has not yet been started but efforts are continuing to resume work during this year.

3) Uruk site: The maintenance work was carried out for the lower part of the northern corner of the ziggurat under the supervision of the German mission represented by the maintenance expert Professor Christophe Ziegert and engineer Andreas Hofshield, and the course of the rain stream was diverted from the body of the ziggurat. In addition to starting to put in place the required treatments for problems of damage and fragmentation in the Ziggurat (Anu) (White Temple) and the stone building. The four types of geophysical survey, geomatics, Drones and archeology of the site that are carried out by the German mission have been initiated since 2015 and they are still continuing. However, the work has not being accomplished yet due to country’s current situation.

5. Urges the State Party to extend the comprehensive survey and mapping to all three cultural components of the property, as baseline data for future work, and to develop operational conservation plans for each as a matter of priority, and to submit these to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies;

Work is underway to carry out surveys of the three cultural components, as survey work has been carried out at Aredo site by the Italian university of Sapienza. Moreover, the survey work at Al-Warka site still in progress in coordination and supervision of the German mission. Nevertheless, the country’s circumstances led to an irregular visits of the mission to Iraq and prevented the completion of the work (Iraq hopes to complete it during the coming period). As for Ur site, work was previously started by the American archaeological mission from Stony Brook University in New York, currently, more excavations works are currently being planned at the site. Here we would like to emphasize that Iraq is keen to complete the work of comprehensive survey of the three cultural components for the purpose of setting operational conservation plans and submit them for review by advisory committees. The improvement of country’s situation will contribute in accomplishment of survey works during the coming period.

3- NATURAL HERITAGE

6. Appreciates that a study to establish the minimum water flow needed for the natural components of the property has been undertaken, but notes with deep concern that this minimum flow has not been met in the past two years, and reiterates its request to the State Party to provide the natural components of the property with adequate water within its national capacity as a matter of utmost priority;

During the previous years, especially 2017-2018, the Ahwar suffered from scarce in incoming water quantities due to climate change effects, cutting off water resources from the eastern borders, and the decrement in water allocations from the upstream. From the period
November 2018 until the end of May 2019, the Ahwar were exposed to a flood season on Tigris river, in addition to the occurrence of high floods from the eastern borders. The region also has exposed to heavy rains that greatly increase water inflows to the Ahwar. At the end of 2019, the amount of water reached 12.3 BCM with an increment of 112% (above the specified water amounts allocated to the marshes in the strategic study (5.8 BCM)). This has positively influences the environment of the Ahwar besides the socio-economic aspects. That was noticed by the return of water buffalo breeders who had been displaced before during the previous periods in addition to the flourishing of bio diversity and a noticeable increase in the vegetation cover (Maps No. A1, A2, B1, B2) within the Core boundary. The vegetation cover area reached 142 km$^2$ in 2018 and reached 613 km$^2$ in 2019, i.e. an increase of 331%. Moreover, the region has witnessed reappearance of specific type of water plants (water lily plant as an example), these types were vanished for more than 15 years ago. An increase in fish stock has also been notified which in turn led to an increase in the standards of living for Arab Ahwar.

The return of Water lily plant after 15 years of absence


The return of Water lily plant after 15 years of absence

(https://www.nasiriaelc.com/2019/05/162657)
7. Strongly encourages again the States Parties of Iraq, Iran and Turkey to continue their efforts in cooperating towards long-term sustainable water management, so as to ensure the provision of adequate amounts of water for the natural components of the property to sustain their contribution to its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV);

The Iraqi government continues meetings and dialogues with neighboring countries on special issues in the field of water and joint technical cooperation for the purpose of reaching solutions regarding water sharing and the most important measures taken:

1. Measures made with the Turkish side:

- The meetings of the 18th session of the Iraqi-Turkish Joint Economic Committee were held for the period 3-4 /5/2018 in Ankara to insure continue discussions between the Iraqi Ministry of Water Resources and the Turkish Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs to reach a time schedule for a long-term agreement between the two sides to secure the required water allocations for Iraq in which through, the required water amounts for marshlands sustainability will be insured.

- In light of the visit of H.E. the Minister of Water Resources, Dr. Gamal Abbas Al-Adili to Turkey with a delegation accompanying the President of the Iraqi Republic, H.E. Dr. Barham Salih, that took place in January 2019, the water portfolio was discussed on top of the topics in the visit agenda with the Turkish side. During a second visit to Turkey for a high level delegation presented by H.E. the Prime Minister Dr. Adel Abdulmahdi in May 2019, H.E. the Iraqi Minster of Water Resources has delivered a draft of a legal agreement to the Turkish side includes the required shares of water to Iraq from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. A national team was formed in coordination with the concerned authorities to reach out a comprehensive agreement to determine the required water allocations.

- The team held a meeting in Baghdad on 31/7/2019 with the Turkish side, which was chaired by the advisor of the President of the Turkish Republic for Water Affairs, and his team included experts and specialists from the ministries of agriculture, forestry, foreign affairs, environment, electricity, housing and trade. Regarding water issues, the Iraqi side presented a draft agreement that included the Iraqi shares of the water of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (which has already been delivered to them). The Turkish side showed its interest in the topic of water sharing and asked to define the needs and promised to study the draft agreement and taking the final decision in order to sign it.

- Based on what was agreed upon between the two sides in Baghdad meeting above, technical teams were formed regarding; a study of the upper Zab river, a study of a proposal to establish a joint Iraqi research center for water, and a team for the projects and dams that Turkey has proposed to contribute in their implementation. The first Iraqi technical team visited Turkey in 9/9/2019 but the Turkish side was not prepared to pursue any serious negotiations or technical meetings.
2. Actions taken with the Iranian side:
   - A meeting in Tehran was held in 6/4/2019 between the Iraqi Minister of Water Resources and the Iranian Minister of Energy. Various topics were discussed, including the importance of deepening the relationships between the two countries and common water issues, including the file of sharing water of the common rivers, and the agreement to form technical teams. A proposed meeting for discussing the specified issues was arranged by the Iraqi side and it formally informed the Iranian side to confirm the meeting. However, the Iranian side has not confirmed the meeting yet.
   - A request was submitted by the Ministry of Water Resources to the Iranian side for the purpose of activating the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2012 to discuss common river issues, water scarcity, and to study the Iranian drainage water flowing towards Iraq. However, nothing has accomplished yet.

3. Other issues:
   - Iraq requested the concerned international parties to activate the United Nations Convention on the Law of Using International Watercourses for Non-Navigational Purposes of 1997 to which Iraq has joined in 2001 and entered into force in 2014 to enhance cooperation between the countries organizing the agreement under the auspices of the United Nations General Assembly.
   - Iraq is now in the final process of joining the Water Convention, Helsinki 1992, for the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, to be ratified by the Iraqi parliament.
   - The Ministry of Water Resources has participated in a number of meetings and water forums regarding water and international water issues.
8. While appreciating that the State Party considers that World Heritage designation provides adequate legal protection to the property, also reiterates its request to the State Party to complete the designation of all of the natural components of the property as protected areas in order to provide effective protection under national legislative and management systems, as required in the Operational Guidelines,

The inclusion of the natural components of the property within the World Heritage Convention provides legal protection for them as protected areas within the national framework. In addition, these components are listed in Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. The Iraqi in force laws protect the property to enable the executive bodies to take legal actions against violators, the work is in progress through the Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Management Plan for the Ahwar of Southern Iraq as a World Heritage to make modifications to the Wildlife Protection Law and present it to the parliament for to insure a wider protection for the property.

9. Reiterating its previous significant concern over the continued vulnerability of the natural components of the property to oil and gas developments, recalls the Committee’s established position that oil and gas exploration and exploitation are incompatible with World Heritage status, and strongly urges again the State Party to make a permanent commitment to not explore or exploit oil and gas within the property, and to ensure that any such activities outside the property do not cause a negative impact on its OUV;

As a result of the exposure of the Ahwar to a wave of torrents, which caused an increase in the heavily submerged area, the oil activities have been limited. This led to a discontinuation of exploration work in those areas at the present time (in the vicinity of the property). Basra Petroleum Company continuously obligates the companies investing in licensing rounds to adhere to the environmental impact studies of the adjacent areas to the marshlands, noting that the current instructions in force by the Ministry of Oil are in line with environmental regulations to preserve the marshes and wetlands. These companies support the infrastructure and local communities in those areas by restoring or establishing some schools, hospitals, community centers, and youth centers. Companies also support rehabilitation of roads for the purpose of promoting the settlement and provide jobs alternatives to reduce the pressure on the Ahwar's areas. Also, we refer to the continuous work of the "Committee for Ensuring Good and Implementing the Ecological System of the Marshlands Property" Formed by Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Management Plan for the Ahwar of Southern Iraq as a World Heritage Property.
10. Requests the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre data concerning illegal bird hunting, overfishing, including the number of prosecutions and convictions from these illegal activities, and to further strengthen its legal protection, enforcement and management capacity to control these activities;

Government agencies continue its relentless pursuit to reduce overfishing. Great efforts are being made to monitor fishing activities and raise environmental awareness of fishers (in particular) and the local population (in general) about the risks of these practices on biodiversity in the region (as these practices classified as one of the most pressing practices on biological diversity of all kinds). As a result of these efforts, overfishing activities have largely reduced. However, during the last period, a number of cases were recorded, and necessary measures were taken about them, through the listed actions:

a) Coordination with the Environmental Police Department in Maysan Governorate in 27/5/2019 about what social media reported about a practices attributed to the Border Police in the area of AL-SHEEB and AL-TEB by killing a group of hyenas, which are considered endangered species, and continue to urge the environmental police to take the necessary measures in this regard.

b) Carrying out continuous patrols with the aim of monitoring and preventing overfishing of fish in Al-Musehab, Al-Salal and Al-Sebees / Madinah district, because of use inequitable fishing methods for large and small fish in the breeding season and convert them into animal feed.

c) Coordination with the Basra Operations Command in 3/11/2019 regarding some persons using the Agricultural shadow lattice for fishing after making small openings in the area of Al-Sebis / Al-Madinah district and fixing this clamp to lattice to catch the largest number of fish.
d) Coordination with the environmental police to conduct campaigns against overfishing for users of small nets.

e) A number of traffickers of water birds in Dhi Qar were referred to AL-FOHOD court.

f) A sub-committee have been formed emanating from the Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Management Plan for the Ahwar of Southern Iraq as a World Heritage Property for the review of laws and legislation in force related to overfishing.

g) Ongoing Follow-up with the environmental police to emphasize the necessity of activating and implementing the provisions of hunting regulation in the marsh areas No. (2) of 2017 of Protection and Enhancement of Environment Law No. (27) for the year 2009 which specified ways of hunting birds and fish and the periods during which hunting is prohibited and the species that are not allowed to be caught (Threatened with extinction, close to the extinction, with aesthetic and local importance) and the numbers allowed to hunt for each person, in addition to other laws in force on the subject.

h) Seek to create the Marsh Protection Department and the Environmental Police Center in the governorates of Maysan and Dhi Qar.

4- INTEGRATED MANAGEMENT PLAN

11. Also urges the State Party to prepare an updated Integrated Management Plan for the entire property, and to promote the development of updated Management Plans for each of the components of the property;

Work is in progress through the Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Management Plan for the Ahwar of Southern Iraq as a World Heritage Property to collect the required data to update an integrated management plan for the property. The conditions that Iraq is currently passing through 2019 till now have hindered work progress in completing the update of the management plan and delaying its completion within the specified time. Its commitment to develop and update the property management plan during the next short period and to circulate the updated paragraphs on the special management plans for each component of the property.
5- TOURISM PLAN

12. Also welcomes the measures taken to ensure tourism activities do not damage the property, and further reiterates its request to the State Party to develop and implement an overall tourism plan for the whole property, to regulate visitation, and to ensure visitor safety, and sustainable and adequate tourism practices, infrastructure and facilities;

The Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Management Plan for the Ahwar of Southern Iraq as a World Heritage Property is working through its representatives from the ministries and relevant authorities to organize and follow up tourism activities in the areas of the property components, whether cultural or natural. The Local Administrations of the Administrative Units in those areas have been instructed not to issue approvals for the implementation of projects of a tourist nature until obtaining the approval of the Higher National Committee. A number of small projects of a tourist nature were established within the natural components of The Ahwar of Southern Iraq property under the supervision and implementation of the commission in the Hawizeh and Central Marshes that contribute to the development of tourism activity in the area and within the determinants that include the use of environmentally friendly building materials that simulate the cultural character of the marshes. Currently, a contracting agreement has been prepared with Orem to establish a Visitor Guidance Center within the global requirements, so that it does not affect the exceptional value of the site. A project for preparing and implementing a comprehensive tourism management plan for the property was included in the works that will be implemented for the year 2020 to provide the financial allocations necessary for its completion.

6- ENGAGING LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN MATTERS RELATED TO WATER USE

13. Also requests the State Party to continue to meaningfully engage with the local communities on matters concerning water usage, rights-based approaches to management and for the application of traditional ecological knowledge to any planned new constructions;

In 2014, Water Users’ Associations was established, in the middle of 2018 its reached 140 societies distributed in various regions of Iraq to give the direct stakeholders of water users represented by farmers a role in the organization, operation and management of water resources. The project was implemented in cooperation with the JICA which worked and is still working to provide assistance to the agricultural and irrigation sectors to achieve appropriate water management by beneficiaries through a participatory irrigation development plan to improve water management, as it was implemented through these associations:

- Formulating a plan that reflects decision-making by the Water Users Association
- The Water User Association implemented the plan through field water management practices.
Based on the achieved result, the plan will be modified periodically, which will reflect on a more equitable distribution of water and rationalization of consumption in agricultural areas, which will be reflected in providing water suitable for the biological diversity in the marshes.

The local communities have been seriously involved in the rights of managing the Ahwar of Southern Iraq property through their effective contributions in proposing and implementing projects that serve the property and also in reducing the risks experienced by the natural components and adapting to the developments, especially in the dry and flood seasons, knowing that the representatives of the local population in the committee continue to attend periodic meetings and contribute to the work of the sub-committees formed by the Higher National Committee.

Water users’ associations meeting

7- WORLD HERITAGE CENTRE/ICOMOS/IUCN REACTIVE MONITORING MISSION TO THE PROPERTY

14. Also regrets that the joint World Heritage Centre/ICOMOS/IUCN Reactive Monitoring mission to the property could not be undertaken yet, and reiterates furthermore its request that the mission takes place as soon as possible;

The mission of the National Committee for Education, Culture and Science (UNESCO), the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and (ICOMOS) apologized from visiting the marshes areas that were scheduled on 25/10/2019, according to the email sent to us on 21/10/2019, due to urgent obligations. The Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Management Plan for the Ahwar of Southern Iraq as a World Heritage Property expresses its full readiness to complete the visit on the date specified by the National Commission for Education, Culture and Science (UNESCO).

8- PLANED CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

15. Reminds the State Party about the need to submit to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies, information on any future plans for major restoration or new
construction projects that may affect the OUV of the property, in line with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, before making any decisions that would be difficult to reverse;

Projects are proposed to be carried out inside the property by the Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Management Plan for the Ahwar of Southern Iraq as a World Heritage Property. Noting that these projects in line with environmental regulations to preserve the marshes and wetlands. Its also support the infrastructure of local communities in those areas:

1) Modern villages project
2) Rest locations for delegations, tourists and visitors
3) Waste and water jungles recycling.
4) The Garden of Aden.
5) Sustainability of handicrafts and establish marketing stores for them
6) Update the management plan data.
7) Research stations
8) Geopark
9) Modernization of the Biodiversity Project, KBA
10) Assessment of pollution level and severity (treatment implementation).
11) Preparing plans for confronting risks and integrated management.
12) Tourist development for the property
13) Legal procedures and legislations for protection.

9- SURVEY THE BIRDS OF PREY COMING IN THE MARSHES

Eleven field trips were carried out to the central marshes for the period from February 2018 to April 2019. The purpose of the field survey was to determine the location and time distribution of the birds of prey, the density of the species is estimated between 0.0042 - 0.035 birds / hectare, approximately 7000 birds of prey coming to the marshes were recorded.

10. SIGNATURE OF THE CONCERNED AUTHORITY

28-1-2020

Dr. Jamal Abbas Mohsin Al-Adilee

Head of the Higher Committee for the Implementation of the Management Plan for the Ahwar of Southern Iraq as a World Heritage Property

Minister of Water Resources of the Republic of Iraq