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# Maya Site of Copan (Honduras) No 129bis

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## 1 Basic data

### State Party

Honduras

### Name of property

Maya Site of Copan

### Location

Copan Ruinas,  
Department of Copan

### Inscription

1980

### Brief description

Discovered in 1570 by Diego García de Palacio, the ruins of Copán, one of the most important sites of the Mayan civilization, were not excavated until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The ruined citadel and imposing public squares reveal the three main stages of development before the city was abandoned in the early 10<sup>th</sup> century.

### Date of ICOMOS approval of this report

12 March 2020

## 2 Issues raised

### Background

At the time of inscription of the property on the World Heritage List, no precise limits of the property and no buffer zone were defined. In the framework of the retrospective inventory, the World Heritage Committee urged the State Party to officially submit the limits of the World Heritage property and its buffer zone (33 COM 7B.137, Seville, 2009). The information presented by the State Party in response to this request was considered incomplete and unclear by ICOMOS. Following a new submission, the boundaries of the World Heritage property were approved by the World Heritage Committee at its 41<sup>st</sup> session (Krakow, 2017).

A buffer zone, larger than the one under review in this present report, had been proposed in the Management Plan 2014-2020 but was not approved by the *Instituto Hondureño de Antropología e Historia* (IHAI) and the stakeholders, for several reasons, especially because (1) it was considered to be too extended on the northeast side to effectively implement legal restrictions, and (2) had led to land speculations as the State had expressed its willingness to buy land included in the buffer zone.

In 2019 the State Party submitted a Minor Boundary Modification delimiting a proposed buffer zone of 258.365 ha, which was similar in general terms to the previous one, but had reduced its size at the northeast and southeast (south of the river).

Beyond the buffer zone, the State Party described an "area of influence" (zone 2) as having "its own restrictions albeit less strict than those of the buffer zone". Within this area of influence, the Management Plan had created eleven "protected enclaves" (*recintos protegidos*), which mark an area around a monument (for example, a stele or an altar), in order for it to receive the same kind of protections as the elements in the buffer zone.

Another issue raised by the State Party in 2019 was the ownership of the site's buffer zone. The State Party, as on previous occasions, expressed its intent to buy the areas of the buffer zone that are not already in possession of the State.

The World Heritage Committee decided in 2019 to refer back the proposed buffer zone to the State Party (decision 43 COM 8B.53) in order to complete the map showing the proposed buffer zone; provide more detailed information on the legislation regulating the property, the buffer zone and the area of influence; specify how the regulation of the buffer zone will be enforced, and how and when an agreement with all the landowners will be reached.

### Modification

The revised proposal, submitted by the State Party in February 2020, maintains the same size (258.365 ha) of the buffer zone as proposed previously. The buffer zone is described as having an "exclusive zone" (gathering areas 1 and 2, the latter being the extension of the Archaeological Park, marked in green on the map), where only positive changes for investigation, heritage protection and visitor safety are accepted. The only area where more flexibility in the activities is permitted is the location of the public facilities, in the north western part of area 1. The second zone, called "zone of restricted activities" (gathering areas 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8), only allows low impact activities (agriculture and pasture). Other low impact changes will be allowed, as described by the State Party, "if they are to satisfy a social or economic necessity without alternative, in which case a strict impact assessment will be undertaken, and its recommendations implemented". The areas 1 to 8 have different ownership and land-use statuses. Areas 1 and 5 are state owned, the other areas are private property.

In this proposal, the State Party describes three regulation zones instead of the four mentioned in the 2019 proposal: The World Heritage Property (zone 0), the buffer zone (zone 1), and the rest of the National Monument of Copan (zone 2).

The proposal eliminates the Area of Influence and the eleven Protected Enclaves proposed previously. The State Party explains that they resulted "confusing for the managers of the site and for the community at large". The State Party determined that such areas were not necessary, due to the existence of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage and the Declaration of Copan as National Monument, which already provide an adequate protection of all the archaeological vestiges over the whole of the Copan Valley. The Law provides the basis for the competent authorities "to dictate preventive or prohibitive measures they consider necessary for the conservation and protection of these properties" (Art. 9 of the Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage). The Law also provides for the possibility to expropriate when necessary without a legislative decree (Art. 56).

As mentioned above, not all parts of the buffer zone are state owned. In the latest Minor Boundary Modification proposal, the State Party renounced the plan to buy all areas of the buffer zone due to the high cost of such a transaction. At the same time, the State Party reiterated the desire to buy area 2, which is private property but currently under the management of the IHAH, however, not "in the foreseeable future". The State Party considers that "the management arrangements have been working for more than 30 years, and there is no foreseeable reason that this would change".

ICOMOS considers that the proposed buffer zone will reinforce the management and protection of the property.

ICOMOS considers that the buffer zone is adequate and recommends the State Party to closely work together with the private owners of the land included in zone 2, in order to achieve the best possible protection of the World Heritage property and its value. Furthermore, ICOMOS encourages the State Party to apply as strictly as possible the Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage with the aim to protect all relevant elements pertaining to the National Monument within the Copan Valley.

- b) Applying as strictly as possible the Law for the Protection of Cultural Heritage with the aim to protect all relevant elements pertaining to the National Monument within the Copan Valley;

### 3 ICOMOS Recommendations

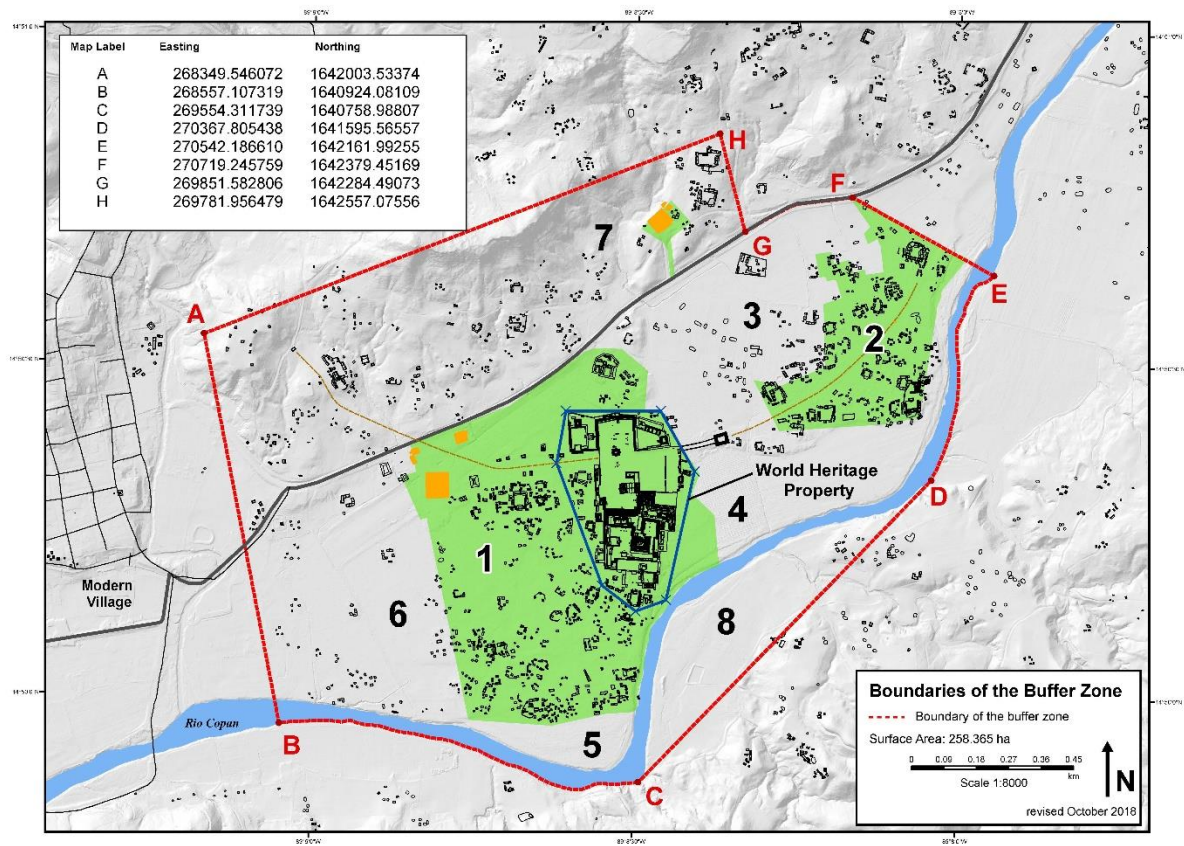
#### Recommendation with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that the proposed buffer zone for the Maya Site of Copan, Honduras, be **approved**.

#### Additional recommendations

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

- a) Closely working with the private owners of the land included in zone 2 in order to achieve the best possible protection of the World Heritage property and its value,



Map showing the proposed buffer zone