

Second meeting of the Coordinating Committee on the Serial World Heritage Nomination of the Silk Roads, 3-6 May 2011, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan

ASHGABAT AGREEMENT

Summary:

The network of land routes and settlements commonly known as the Silk Roads stretching from East Asia right across to the Mediterranean and down into the Indian subcontinent were the medium for a two-way transfer of trade goods for nearly two millennia. These routes uniquely represent the history and culture of many societies and the historical periods; and honor the longstanding social and cultural exchanges between East and West. The idea of preparing a serial and transnational nomination for the Silk Roads in Central Asia and China arose out of the 2005 UNESCO World Heritage Periodic Reporting cycle where Asian State Parties identified such a nomination as a follow-up action.

This ambitious and highly complex project has the potential to become the largest nomination of linked sites ever presented to the World Heritage Committee. The Silk Roads Serial Nomination project has the capacity to further extend contemporary international exchange, and its success will be based on mutual cooperation between all participating States Parties in the promotion of transnational serial nominations.

Background:

Based on the World Heritage nomination Action Plan developed at the Samarkand, Uzbekistan in October 2006, a Concept paper for the Serial Nomination of the Silk Roads in Central Asia and China was adopted in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in April 2007, by the Central Asian and Chinese States Parties, and amended in June 2008 during a further Silk Roads consultation workshop in Xi'an, China. In May 2009, at the Silk Roads consultation meeting in Almaty, Kazakhstan, the participating States Parties agreed to establish an intergovernmental Coordinating Committee on the Serial World Heritage Nomination of the Silk Roads. In November 2009, the first meeting of the Coordinating Committee took place in Xi'an, China, at this meeting, the States Parties appointed the ICOMOS International Conservation Centre (IICC) Xi'an to be the Secretariat; they also decided to create an expert group for documentation, and requested UNESCO and ICOMOS to carry out a Thematic Study of the Silk Roads.

The second meeting of the Coordinating Committee took place in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, in May 2011. The Ashgabat meeting was composed of representatives of 12 States Parties: Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Republic of Korea, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, of UNESCO, as well as of experts from the International Council for Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the International Institute for Central Asian Studies, an UNESCO category II Centre located in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, University College, London, United Kingdom, and the Raymond Lemaire International Centre for Conservation, the University of Leuven, Belgium.

Aim:

The aim of the Ashgabat Meeting was to review the progress of the nomination process, to consider the new guidance on transnational serial nominations, the outcome from the International World Heritage expert meeting on serial nominations and properties in Ittingen, Switzerland, in February 2010, which is of high relevance to the future preparation of the Silk Roads serial nomination, to consolidate the nominations strategy, and to review the draft ICOMOS Thematic Study.

Main Outcomes:

The participants of the meeting agreed to work towards achieving the following during 2011:

1. To accept, in principle, the heritage corridor approach proposed by the ICOMOS Thematic Study, while recognising the need for further technical evaluation and clarification of the nomination process;
2. To establish an overall Silk Roads World Heritage nomination framework, reflecting the new guidance on serial trans-boundary nominations arising from the International World Heritage expert meeting on serial nominations and properties in Ittingen, Switzerland, February, 2010;
3. To agree, between Central Asian countries and China, the priority of the transnational heritage corridors for the first phase of the Silk Roads nomination process; without excluding the possibility of other transnational heritage corridors being considered for nomination by the Coordinating Committee;
4. To reactivate the existing Expert Group of representatives from Central Asia and China, in collaboration with the IICC – Xi'an, Secretariat of the Coordinating Committee, through virtual communications;
5. To enhance the technical capacity through the designation of National Project Managers by the respective governments, UNESCO National Commissions, or relevant authorities within each participating State Party, for the preparation of the first phase of nominations (both national and transnational);
6. To develop and implement an appropriate management system for the identified Silk Roads nominations (both national and transnational);
7. To request UNESCO World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS to identify facilitators and advisors for the first phase of the nomination process, in close cooperation with the Coordinating Committee; to organise technical training on the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention; and to further extend the Thematic Study to Korea and Japan;
8. To enhance the exchange of information related to the required documentation for preparation of nomination dossiers. (In this regard participants welcomed the UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust project “**Support for documentation standards and procedures of the Silk Roads World Heritage Serial and translational Nomination in Central Asia**” and the Belgian project “Silk Roads Cultural Heritage Resource information System (CHRIS)”);
9. And to encourage all participating State Parties to allocate the necessary funds and resources for the timely preparation of nomination dossiers.

The meeting further agreed that since the potential target date for the official submission of the first phase of the Silk Roads transnational nomination dossiers should be **1 February 2013**, the next meeting of the Coordinating Committee should take place before September 2012, in order to review and consider the draft nomination dossiers.

Delegates of the Second Meeting of the Coordinating Committee on the Serial World Heritage Nomination of the Silk Roads expressed their gratitude to the:

- Government of Turkmenistan, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Commission for UNESCO, and other authorities in Turkmenistan, for hosting the meeting, for their warm hospitality, for their support, and for the provision of favourable conditions that allowed the successful organisation of the meeting;
- Ministry of Culture, TV and Radio Broadcasting, Turkmenistan, for the successful organisation of field trips to Kunya-Urgench and the Parthian Fortress of Nisa, both World Heritage properties in Turkmenistan;
- UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS, and the UNESCO Offices in Teheran, Almaty, and Tashkent for facilitating the meeting.

Moreover, participants were extremely appreciative for the financial contributions for the meeting from the UNESCO/Japan Funds-in-Trust project and the UNESCO/Norway Funds-in-Trust project, as well as support from the Government of Turkmenistan.
