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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION
OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

BUREAU OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

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**Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda: UNESCO's Medium-Term Plan for
1996 - 2001 and World Heritage Conservation**

Over the past twenty years, the World Heritage Convention has given a new perspective to the eternal integration of nature and culture, and, in the years to come, this will remain a major thread of continuity in actions undertaken by the World Heritage Centre.

Although different international conventions concerning either culture or nature (such as The Hague Convention or the Biodiversity Convention) have been strengthened or have recently come into force, the 1972 Convention remains the only one to consider as inseparable these two essential elements of life and the evolution of man on earth.

Therefore, over and above the perspectives of daily or medium-term action of the World Heritage Centre, the strengthening and broadening of intellectual reflection which it must help to incite will become increasingly essential: to encourage new insights into nature and its enduring links with the diverse cultural history of mankind; not only has nature consistently served as support, but the balanced use of its resources has permitted the survival of the human race. Therefore, the Centre should also contribute to a better understanding of cultural identities and their specific characteristics. Each culture is not only a group of monuments, beliefs, traditions and knowledge, but it also has specific relationships with animals, plants and all the natural elements. These are amongst the aspects that the 1972 Convention and the World Heritage Centre should help to explore.

However, the value and significance of the cultural heritage goes beyond the rich and multifaceted interactions between nature and culture: the majority of cultural monuments and sites inscribed on the World Heritage List were not all chosen for their "beauty", but also for their significance, their symbolic importance in the main religious beliefs and major events of the history of humankind.

Thus, they are also messengers of the cultures which have erected them, or the events which have seen them emerge and to which they bear witness. Each one of them can and should also play a primordial role as a channel or support for dialogue between cultures and reflection on humankind, and thus respect for others and their identity, and the fight against exclusion. In this way, they would contribute directly to one of the major goals of UNESCO, the construction of a culture for peace.

World Heritage, which is the crystallization of understanding of the relationship between nature and culture on the one hand, and between human beings on the other, also appears as one of the most central and mobilizing themes for environmental education projects, the understanding and respect of cultural diversity, and tolerance and peace.

Consequently, what assessment can be made of the functioning of the Centre and what directions are to be retained for the future?

After twenty years of existence of the Convention and two years of existence of the Centre, their institutional mechanisms have proven their effectiveness:

- * The List comprises 411 properties inscribed as of 1 January 1994, and it can be said that, except for the properties situated on territories of States which have only recently (or not yet) ratified the Convention, the essential components of the world heritage as we know it today have at least been identified. The List of course is not closed, but it is more through the recognition of new types of properties that one can expect the most significant future developments.
- * The mechanisms for reception, analysis, treatment and implementation of international assistance requests are at present well-orchestrated at the Centre, and all requests are studied and treated without delay. Within the Sectors, the cooperation and coordination of activities, seen in a "cultural and natural heritage" perspective rather than one of "World Heritage properties", is continually being strengthened and improved. The States Parties are satisfied with the actions implemented by the Centre, and UNESCO in general, in this field.
- * The bases for a promotional policy have been established and several activities in this field have been implemented over recent years, in particular at the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the Convention. Here again, although much remains to be done, we are on solid ground.

These different points should provide the basis for reflection on the perspectives, both conceivable and desirable, for the World Heritage Centre for the period 1996-2001.

It would appear that the conclusions to be drawn are that we must evolve from the quantitative to the qualitative, and in several directions:

1. For the future development of the List, and to complete World Heritage identification, qualitative rather than quantitative reflection is called for. Most of the monuments and sites of universal importance, considered from the viewpoint of traditional categories of "classical" art history, have already been identified, and for the most part, inscribed.

Reflection should now focus on more fundamental and somewhat "philosophical" problems: What concept of human heritage is rejected by the List as it exists today? What is human heritage today, does it only comprise the types of properties representing the majority on the List today, or does it also comprise other categories of properties, little or not represented, or even those to which no thought has yet been given? The recent revisions to the Convention's criteria, which introduce the idea of cultural landscapes, now allows the international recognition of new forms of non-monumental cultural heritage of different cultures, and correlatively of associated beliefs and traditions.

This widening of the Convention's concept of cultural heritage to non-constructed aspects should obviously be pursued and elaborated without going beyond the framework established in 1972.

On the practical side, it will allow the States which are not yet Party to the Convention and whose national cultures have produced few or no "monuments", to join the Convention and find their place. This requires a serious qualitative reflection on the List, the notion of human heritage, and consequently on the global study and the necessary associated thematic studies.

2. **Monitoring the state of conservation of sites:**

Ninety-six reports on the state of conservation of the 378 sites inscribed at that time were presented in 1993 to the Committee or its Bureau. If this number should further increase in the future, it is more towards an improvement of the monitoring **methods** of the sites already inscribed (or to be inscribed) that efforts should be made, in close liaison with the States Parties themselves:

- a) for basic reasons of principle : it serves no purpose to inscribe a site of universal value on the List if its preservation is not assured;
- b) for reasons related to the history of the Convention: because the heritage of the highly developed countries

was largely inscribed in the first years of the Convention, and amongst those that have been inscribed recently, or will be in the future, the proportion of properties situated in countries which have a more pressing need for assistance in this field, will probably increase;

- c) for reasons owing to the general evolution of the world: because over the years, the number of threats which weigh upon the heritage appear, unfortunately, to increase.

For all these reasons, not only must extensive monitoring action be developed, but also, and especially, its quality must be improved. This entails the development of monitoring mechanisms which are systematic, decentralized and particularly, as far as possible, preventive. This monitoring should be carried out using to the greatest extent possible, the centralized services of the Organization, its regional offices and its field representatives, but also with our "traditional" partners, which are the international and "local" NGOs (e.g. ICOMOS, IUCN, WCMC, WWF and others) and especially in close cooperation with the States Parties themselves, which of course assume the major responsibility for the conservation of the sites. Recognition of the need to safeguard the sites and prevent any political, economic or administrative action occurring which would endanger the values and characteristics for which the site was inscribed on the List must be encouraged. Site managers and local authorities as well as local populations should be made aware of the immense value of the sites, so they may fully recognize that they belong to world heritage and thus are of exceptional value. The general public should be informed and educated so that they may contribute to the protection of the sites. These are some of the actions for which cooperation with the States Parties is indispensable in order to safeguard this heritage.

Links should be established or strengthened with the NGOs, in particular all those that work at the regional, national and local levels and which testify, in their associative forms, to the citizens' interest in their heritage, so that state of conservation reports can be compiled regularly from the "field".

3. At present, all requests for **international assistance** received by the Centre are treated and implemented satisfactorily, but in the coming years the change in the scale of our action must be taken into account. Indeed, due consideration being given to the increasing threats to the conservation of sites, which, alas, are amplified owing to political unrest, civil wars, natural or man-made catastrophes and increasing poverty in many rural zones of developing countries where numerous World Heritage sites are situated, our actions should be carried out on quite another scale than that which is presently provided for by the Convention. The funds currently available play an important catalytic role in preparing conservation measures and consequently giving momentum to the implementation of projects, especially as concerns preparatory assistance. But, even if this allocation is greatly appreciated by the States

Parties, the three types of assistance available (technical cooperation, training and promotion) will become increasingly insufficient: our action should be carried out on a much greater scale, and this is why we are attempting to establish a fund-raising policy based on the project policy (cf. point 4). As the ultimate goal of our action is to respond not only to isolated requests but to encourage significant transfers, financial, human and technical, not only in order to fulfil these needs, particularly in their multiple aspects, but especially to ensure that the populations and site managers are given the opportunity to learn that their true interest lies in being our partners in the long-term conservation of the sites, and not in committing destructive actions for immediate but temporary benefits.

In increasing the three budget lines of the World Heritage Fund for technical cooperation, monitoring and the global study (for the latter, very modestly), during its seventeenth session in 1993, the Committee made way for future development. But in the coming years, other means should be found to increase technical cooperation and more particularly, our efforts should concentrate on the quality of our action, (here again it is with regard to the qualitative aspect that efforts should be made):

- by foreseeing the needs of States Parties, through continual close cooperation with them and the site managers (cf. monitoring), so as to develop a liaison and a preventive and advisory role, and through this to envisage, even to instigate, with them well before damage occurs, well-targeted and formulated requests for international assistance, and to ensure close monitoring of the implementation and evaluation of the results, and possible necessary future action.
- In further developing cooperation with the Sectors, not only **Culture** (CLT/CH) and **Science** (SC/ECO), but also with the other divisions or sectors, and in closely associating conservation and the sustainable development of populations. For example, with the **Education** Sector for all that concerns heritage education and creating people's awareness of their traditional cultures, non-physical heritage, science for sustainable development, cultural tourism, etc. In this way, world heritage should hold a central place in UNESCO with a mobilizing and "catalytic" role.

4. A veritable **project policy** should be elaborated rather than waiting for isolated requests from States Parties. This policy could cover the training component, for which professional competence already exists at the Centre, and also fund-raising for specific conservation projects. On this basis, a fund-raising policy and even a marketing approach should be conceived and refined in a global and strategic perspective avoiding isolated and uncoordinated

actions. The elaboration of a clear and coherent concept of our engagement and the links which could be established between heritage conservation and the interests of potential important donors should permit not only to secure financial or in-kind assistance, but also to establish true technological partnerships for the safeguarding of the sites with technically-advanced major international companies. It could also encourage local populations to become increasingly involved in in-situ conservation of their cultural heritage, by preserving its aspect of a support for social life which is a source of continual regeneration of community life and is also propitious in conserving the traditions, techniques and knowledge of cultures of which this heritage is born.

The great majority of local populations could and should be closely associated with the management and safeguarding of the sites, regardless of whether, for example, specific techniques concerning the conservation of material of vegetal origin are concerned or a profound knowledge of nature and its ecological balance. In any event, it is clear that the long-term conservation of properties inscribed on the List will never be guaranteed unless human heritage is first and foremost the concern of those who live alongside it.

5. **Promotion** of the Convention should of course continue to be developed and, as is already reflected in the present biennium, should no longer solely promote the Convention, but should also disseminate information on the heritage and values of members of every culture of the world. In order to achieve this, and fully carry out its role at World Heritage sites, as well as with the entire civil community, promotion must be in step with the 21st century by mobilizing the most advanced technologies: its field of intervention is worldwide, and information dissemination between the sites scattered throughout our Planet should be continual and thorough. The progressive establishment of a number of small "World Heritage centres" in a few selected countries according to the geographical size of the region or the sub-region, the number of sites inscribed, the number and specificity of the cultural areas which are represented and the countries' ability to mobilize human and financial resources, also requires live multimedia communication such as will be provided by the "information highways" which are already under construction. As a first objective, two or three "centres" could be envisaged for the Europe/United States/Canada region, one or two for Latin America, one for the Arab States, one or two for Africa, and two or three for Asia and the Pacific.

Here again, all means must be mobilized in order to anticipate technological progress, rather than, as is often the case, attempt to catch up with it : information channels for promotion will also be used by the constellation of partners in need of advice, assistance, training and education -- sites, but also relays of the civil society -- which will increasingly

express themselves in terms of values represented by world heritage. Several events of worldwide importance should also be the occasion for a very broad diffusion of world heritage messages. At the occasion of the 50th anniversaries of the UN in 1995, then UNESCO in 1996, carefully prepared large exhibitions on World Heritage sites should be presented, to show how, by their symbolic impact and the messages they carry on beliefs, hopes and events of the history of humankind, they illustrate and embody -- sometimes positively, sometimes also negatively -- the great ideals that we defend: peace, justice, tolerance, education, recognition and respect of others. Other important world events, such as the World Exhibitions of 1996 and 2000, amongst others, should provide the opportunity to disseminate throughout the world the messages of our Organization based on heritage values.

To complement these important events, and to ensure the continuity and permanence of diffusion of our message, we will continue to develop our publication The World Heritage Newsletter, which is extremely well-received by States Parties and our partners, to reinforce cooperation with our partners in the field (State Party officials, site managers, international and local NGOs...) and our colleagues in the Organization (CLT, SC, ED, OPI...) to diffuse our experiences of concrete problems and actions undertaken, in a clear and precise manner. Links could also be established through worldwide reviews and journals specializing in our field of competence.

All these considerations indicate two major lines of action for the years to come:

- a) an in-depth **intellectual reflection** on our concepts and practices. Not only on the continual study of the concept of humankind's heritage, but also on the best ways of ensuring the safeguarding of the cultural and natural heritage, sustainable human development and the preservation of the diversity of cultural identities which mutually sustain one another.
- b) a more **decentralized** approach to problems.

All this holds true, as we have seen, with respect to the completion of the identification of world heritage and the completion of the List, monitoring, the implementation of international assistance and promotion/education.

Our future direction should now focus on a threefold action, with more flexible and autonomous administrative and organizational structures which can only be clearly defined through the Organization's thorough reflection and careful self-examination. This threefold action will be:

- **centrifugal** in order to expand and disseminate our message throughout the world, probably at a sub-regional level, to get closer to the sites and

populations, without losing our role of decision-making and central guidance: this is **decentralization**, or perhaps rather **deconcentration**;

- **centripetal**, not only to be immediately informed of the problems, preoccupations and achievements of those in the field, but also to centrally converge the knowledge, reflections and intellectual collaboration which must be expressed in accordance with the specificities of world cultures to which belong, first and foremost, the sites and monuments which it is our duty to protect.

- **transversal**, to unite in a project and a global action the different components of UNESCO, and foresee a **transectoral** working situation of the Centre, whereby World Heritage is a federative and mobilizing concept and one of the focal points for the implementation of the Organization's action.

Only under these conditions can the 1972 Convention attain its ultimate philosophical goals which, beyond the safeguarding of the great achievements of humankind and Nature, clearly concern their reciprocal interactions, the memory of their past and the guarantee of their perpetuity.