

**UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION**

**TWENTY-FOURTH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION
OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

Paris, UNESCO Headquarters

22-23 November 2023

Item 8 of the Provisional Agenda:

Updating of the Policy Document on climate action for World Heritage

SUMMARY

This document is presented in conformity with Resolution **23 GA 11**, by which the General Assembly established at its 23rd session (UNESCO, 2021) an Open-ended Working Group of States Parties to the Convention, with the mandate to review and develop the final version of the Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage as well as proposals for its effective implementation, for consideration by the 24th session of the General Assembly of States Parties. This document presents the outcomes of the Open-ended Working Group.

The present document should be read in conjunction with Document WHC/23/24.GA/INF.8.

Draft Resolution: 24 GA 8, see Point III.

I. BACKGROUND

1. Climate change has become one of the most significant threats to World Heritage, potentially impacting the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of World Heritage properties. This issue was brought to the attention of the World Heritage Committee (hereafter the “Committee”) in 2005, which led to the adoption in 2007 of a [Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on World Heritage properties](#) (hereafter the “Policy Document”) by the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention.
2. Aware that knowledge related to adaptation and mitigation to climate change has drastically increased at the global level over the past 10 years, the World Heritage Committee requested at its 40th session (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016), a periodical review and update of the Policy Document, to make available the most current knowledge and technology on the subject to guide the decisions and actions of the World Heritage community (Decision **40 COM 7**).
3. At its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021), the Committee endorsed the updated Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage (Decision **44 COM 7C**), that had been developed through a two-year process with a wide online consultation of all stakeholders of the Convention and several meetings of a Technical Advisory Group of international experts identified by States Parties through the UNESCO Electoral Groups. The Committee also requested that the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, in consultation with the Advisory Bodies, revise the Policy Document by incorporating views expressed and amendments submitted during the extended 44th session, and consult Committee members. The Committee also requested the World Heritage Centre to convene a Panel of experts in the field of climate science and heritage (see Paragraph 6 below). Furthermore, the Committee requested that the draft updated Policy Document be transmitted for review and adoption at the 23rd session of the General Assembly, in November 2021.
4. Following the Committee’s Decision, States Parties members of the Committee provided inputs and concrete proposals on the three specific points raised in Decision **44 COM 7C**, which were consolidated and reflected in Document [WHC/21/23.GA/INF.11](#) in view of its presentation to the General Assembly.
5. At its 23rd session (UNESCO, 2021), the General Assembly took note of the draft updated Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage, as endorsed by the Committee, and decided to establish an Open-ended Working Group of States Parties with the mandate to develop the final version of the Policy Document, taking into account Decision **44 COM 7C**, as well as proposals for its effective implementation (Resolution **23 GA 11**). The General Assembly also requested that this final version of the Policy Document be presented for consideration by its 24th session in 2023. Moreover, the General Assembly recommended that the Panel of experts requested by the Committee (see Paragraph 4 above) be convened with the mandate to consider revisions to the Policy Document and its unresolved policy matters, and report to the Open-ended Working Group to inform its consideration of the Policy Document and proposals to implement it.
6. This Panel of experts, organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, with the assistance of the Advisory Bodies, took place online, from 30 March to 1 April 2022, with Ms. Abena WHITE (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) as Rapporteur. The experts, who had been identified by the States Parties through the UNESCO Electoral Groups, reviewed the Policy Document section by section, and the unresolved policy matters were discussed through an open discussion. The Panel of experts consequently reported on its work to the Open-ended Working Group on 6 September 2022.

7. The work of both the Panel of experts and the Open-ended Working Group was facilitated thanks to the generous support of the States Parties of Australia, Azerbaijan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

II. SUMMARY OF THE WORK OF THE OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP

8. The Bureau of the Open-ended Working Group was composed of H.E. Ms Yvette SYLLA, at that time Ambassador, Permanent Delegate of the Republic of Madagascar to UNESCO as Chairperson, Australia, Colombia, Lebanon and Poland as Vice-Chairpersons, and Ms Barbara ENGELS (Germany) as Rapporteur. Following the unavailability of H.E. Ms SYLLA (appointed in a ministerial position by her Government), as from January 2023, the meetings of the Open-ended Working Group have been chaired by Ms Carolina DIAZ ACOSTA, Plenipotentiary Minister, Chargée d'Affaires at the Permanent Delegation of Colombia to UNESCO.
9. The Open-ended Working Group held eight meetings with simultaneous participation *in presentia* at UNESCO Headquarters and online. On 22 March 2022, the members of the Open-ended Working Group adopted their working methodology and expected results, and agreed on a detailed schedule. Meetings were consequently held on 16 September and 23 November 2022, as well as on 31 January, 21 March, 3 May, 18 July and 3 November 2023, with on average 77 States Parties attending each meeting, 135 active participants (both *in presentia* and online), as well as 265 webcast connections.
10. As decided by the participants to the Open-ended Working Group, the meetings focused on reviewing the text of the draft updated Policy Document, working on the consolidated version stemming from the Panel of experts, and focusing only on the paragraphs opened for discussion, which were considered by the Panel of experts to have potentially significant implications for the Policy Document and on which it made specific recommendations. In addition, most of the proposed paragraphs of the draft up dated Policy Document had not been subject to amendments during their examination by the World Heritage Committee and were *de facto* considered as entirely relevant by the Panel of experts and by the Open-ended Working Group alike.
11. Based on the fore going and reflecting on its mandate, as a majority of the text of the Policy document had been considered as relevant, the Open-ended Working Group agreed upon working methods that focused its discussions on the finalization of the text of paragraphs that had been subject to recommendations by the Panel of experts. The Working Group also decided that any other amendments proposed and the concerns they raised would be gathered into the final report of the Chairperson, as part of the work submitted by the Working Group but would not be reflected in the final text of the Policy Document (See Part B. below).
12. Last but not least, despite extensive discussions during eight meetings of the Open-ended Working Group due to the very rich debates that took place at each meeting, the Open-ended Working Group could not fully discuss and develop proposals for the effective implementation of the updated Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage. As “food for thought”, the State Party of Australia presented a non-paper on this matter to the members of the Open-ended Working Group. Furthermore, the Secretariat recalled the several implementation measures already adopted by the World Heritage Committee at its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021) in Decision **44 COM 7C**.

A. Key points debated within the Policy Document

13. A few key points were extensively debated by the Open-ended Working Group during its meetings. One of these points related to the appropriate way to refer to the principles expressed in the **United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change**

(UNFCCC) and in **the Paris Agreement** adopted under the UNFCCC. It was acknowledged that the work related to managing the impacts of climate change on World Heritage is to be conducted in recognition of the principles of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement adopted under the UNFCCC, and their centrality in the international climate-related discussions. However, since discussions under the World Heritage Convention do not have the mandate to revise nor rephrase States' obligations and commitments under the international climate change framework, there were lengthy debates regarding the harmonization of the Policy Document, a non-binding text, with other climate change international agreements and frameworks, such as the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement adopted under the UNFCCC. The aim was to avoid any misinterpretation and to remain within the realm of the World Heritage Convention. In this regard, the members of the Open-ended Working Group consensually agreed that, consistent with Article 18 of the 2017 UNESCO Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change¹, nothing in this Policy Document should be understood as an interpretation of any of the principles and provisions of the UNFCCC and of the Paris Agreement adopted under this latter.

14. The Working Group also discussed at length the inclusion of references to the principle of **Common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)**, and the relevant place to refer to it within the Policy Document. While some members wished to include this principle in several paragraphs throughout the Policy Document, wherever relevant, others were of the view that such reference should be limited to one paragraph only, if at all. Due to the difficulty to reach a consensus on this substantial point, informal meetings were organized to further discuss this matter and find a consensual manner to integrate the principle of CBDR-RC in the Policy Document.
15. Participants also mentioned the need to refer to the **precautionary approach** in the Policy Document. A large number of participants were in favour of including such a reference, as suggested by the Panel of experts. This idea was strongly supported by some of the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS) that referred to the 2017 UNESCO Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change, in which the precautionary approach is set as one of the Principles². However, diverging views on the appropriateness of referring to a "*precautionary approach*" were expressed, but resulted in a consensus to refer to it, providing that this Guiding Principle be an encouragement to consider adopting this approach, and not a firm request and that such an approach be focused on World Heritage properties.
16. The participants also addressed the inclusion of the principle of **Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)**. Some members asked to replace the reference to the NDCs principle with a more general reference to their commitments in line with the Paris Agreement. Nevertheless, several members wished to specify that the measures to be adopted by the States Parties regarding climate change should be made in line with their NDCs, as well as to integrate comprehensive mitigation frameworks in the countries' NDCs.
17. During its meetings, the Working Group also debated the inclusion of other principles from **climate change international agreements and frameworks** in the Policy Document, while ensuring that these be taken into account in the context of the World Heritage Convention and would not add any further obligations to States Parties nor any additional interpretations.
18. Participants discussed the potential inclusion of the some of the outcomes of the **reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)** in the Policy Document,

¹ See <https://www.unesco.org/en/ethics-science-technology/climate-change>

² See Article 3 of the 2017 UNESCO [Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change](#).

and if so, either through indirect references or through exact quotes, notably on the causes of the unprecedented atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases (GHG), for which the compromise retained by the Working Group was to refer to anthropogenic emissions and to add a footnote with the definition of “*anthropogenic emissions*”, as defined by the IPCC in its 2018 Global Warming of 1.5°C Report. The use of “*carbon neutral*” or “*climate neutrality*” was also subject to lengthy debates at the end of which, the Working Group decided to use “*carbon neutral*”, with the addition of the definition of “*climate neutrality*” in the Glossary (see Paragraph 22 below).

19. The level of implementation of the Policy Document was also subject to discussion. Participants agreed to mention the national, local and site levels, but others expressed difficulties to include any references to the **international level**. However, the Group followed the Panel of experts’ recommendation maintaining the reference to the international level in many instances in order to ensure the most comprehensive implementation of the Policy Document. During the meetings, it was also stressed that the Policy Document should be understood within the international context of the World Heritage Convention.
20. The Working Group discussed at length the **prospects of climate change**. Considering that the Working Group should not make any projections going beyond the scope of the Policy Document, some participants did not agree on the timeframe of the impacts climate change will have on the properties and recommended to delete any timed objectives. They questioned the certainty of climate change related threats on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of properties, therefore engaging other members to reiterate the scientific evidence of such threats. The latter voiced the necessity to urgently take action before the end of the decade and emphasized that there is growing evidence that climate change is already impacting the properties’ OUV. Nevertheless, the Working Group decided to integrate a list of examples of current hazards, exposures and vulnerabilities as climate change risks to properties in a footnote.
21. It was also recommended to include “**resource mobilization**” and “**technology transfer**”, along with institutional capacity, multi-level governance, and changes in human behaviour and lifestyles, as part of the enabling conditions that support the feasibility of adaptation and mitigation options and can accelerate and scale-up systemic transitions.
22. The Working Group also reflected on the definition of the technical terms related to climate change contained in the Policy Document, and on the necessity to include a **Glossary** drawn from the most up-to-date definitions, as per the IPCC 2022 and 2023 reports. The Working Group decided that, as the Glossary includes the definitions of terms and concepts such as the CBDR-RC Principle and the NDCs, that have not been subject to States negotiations nor formal adoption, such Glossary should not be included as an annex to the adopted Policy Document but should rather be made available on the World Heritage Centre’s website, as a separate resource.

B. Issues raised on paragraphs not open for discussion

23. Despite the importance for the Working Group to avoid going beyond its mandate and to strictly focus on the paragraphs open for discussion, as decided by the participants during the first meetings to focus on the review of the paragraphs on which the Panel of experts had made specific recommendations, a few members submitted amendments on paragraphs that were not open for discussion. While some of them only recommended slight modifications to the wording, others proposed substantial modifications or even the complete deletion of paragraphs. As stated above, the Working Group decided not to include these amendments in the Policy Document but to gather the concerns they raise into the final report of the Chairperson, as part of the work submitted by the Working Group but not reflected in the final text of the Policy Document.

24. Most of the amendments proposed on paragraphs not open for discussion aimed at a better alignment of the Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage with other international agreements, mainly the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, in order to recall the principles set out. The aim was also to improve the work in synergies between these various texts and not in silos, including on the matters of related to CBDR-RC, mitigation, adaptation, GHG emissions, financing and governance. The members proposing such amendments recalled that the language / terminology used in the Paris Agreement was most of the time pre-conditioned to other aspects and could not be partly used in the Policy Document. They were of the view that this language / terminology should therefore be either replicated fully in the Policy Document or deleted from the paragraphs so that the Policy Document doesn't mis-quote or contradict in any way the Paris Agreement.
25. As it was the case on open paragraphs, some amendments aimed at removing references to specific timeframes or timed objectives (e.g., 2023, by mid-century, etc.) on paragraphs not open for discussion. This was notably the case for those drawn from the IPCC and the IPBES reports.
26. Regarding the level of implementation of the Policy Document, it was suggested to remove all references to the international level from the paragraphs not open for discussion. This had also been the case for paragraphs open for discussion, but the Group was in favour of retaining this level.
27. Other amendments also systematically removed references to "*carbon*". In several occurrences, it was suggested to delete references to the "*GHG emissions reductions*", or to rather address it as the "*GHG emissions management*". As another illustration, "*low-carbon alternatives*" was proposed to be replaced by "*low emissions alternatives*" as some states proposed that the GHG emissions should be looked into as a whole rather than through a lens focusing on carbon, which would not provide the global picture.
28. The need to adhere to strict environmental and social safeguards, and to consider carbon storage permanence for the protection of natural and mixed sites as a way to significantly contribute to climate mitigation, was proposed to be deleted by an amendment.
29. Although the Working Group already reflected on this issue on open paragraph, all references to "*right holders*" in paragraphs not open for discussion were proposed for deletion. Since the term "*right holders*" is mentioned several times in the *Operational Guidelines for the implementation of the World Heritage Convention*, the Working Group agreed to retain both World Heritage "*stakeholders*" and "*right holders*" and subsequently agreed that consistency should be ensured throughout the Policy Document regarding this wording.
30. Some amendments also aimed at removing references to "*climate governance*", replacing them with the more general terminology "*addressing challenges related to climate change*". In the same spirit, a paragraph defining climate governance, its objectives and its stakeholders was proposed to be deleted, to only keep a cross-reference to the 2017 UNESCO Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to climate.
31. Most of the concerns related to paragraphs not opened for discussion were addressed in text which was adopted by consensus in the paragraphs that were opened for discussion. Notably, such text concerned the wording relating to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement adopted under the UNFCCC, as well as the inclusion of text from Article 18 of the 2017 UNESCO Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change.
32. Finally, the references to the "*transfer and mobilization of finance*", as formulated in the Policy Document, were recommended to be removed, as being not fully aligned with the terminology of the Paris Agreement in this regard. This included a paragraph detailing how transfer and mobilization of finance are among the necessary enabling conditions to promote climate action for properties, such as investment in infrastructure for

mitigation and adaptation. References to the possible significant upscaling of investments for rapid and far-reaching transitions in many heritage-related sectors were also proposed to be deleted.

III. DRAFT RESOLUTION

Draft Resolution: 24 GA 8

The General Assembly,

1. Having examined Documents WHC/23/24.GA/8 and WHC/23/24.GA/INF.8,
2. Recalling Resolution **23 GA 11**, adopted at its 23rd session (UNESCO, 2021),
3. Also recalling Decisions **40 COM 7**, **41 COM 7**, **42 COM 7**, **43 COM 7.2**, **44 COM 7C** and **45 COM 7.1**, adopted respectively at the 40th (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016), 41st (Krakow, 2017), 42nd (Manama, 2018), 43rd (Baku, 2019), extended 44th (Fuzhou/online, 2021) and extended 45th (Riyadh, 2023) sessions of the World Heritage Committee,
4. Thanking H.E. Ms Yvette Sylla (Madagascar) as elected Chairperson of the Open-ended Working Group established by the General Assembly at its 23rd session (UNESCO, 2021), Ms Carolina Diaz Acosta (Colombia) for her remarkable leadership in chairing meetings of the Open-ended Working Group, Australia, Colombia, Lebanon and Poland as Vice-Chairpersons, Ms Barbara Engels (Germany) as Rapporteur, and all members of the Working Group for the work accomplished,
5. Also thanking the States Parties of Australia, Azerbaijan and the Kingdom of the Netherlands for their generous financial support to the updating process of the 2007 "Policy Document on the impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage properties", and expressing its gratitude to all stakeholders of the World Heritage Convention who contributed to this process,
6. Noting the rich debates that took place during the eight meetings of the Open-ended Working Group established by the General Assembly at its 23rd session (UNESCO, 2021) with the mandate to review and develop its final version taking into account Decision **44 COM 7C**, as well as proposals for its effective implementation,
7. Emphasizing that, consistent with Article 18 of the 2017 UNESCO Declaration of Ethical Principles in relation to Climate Change, nothing in this non-binding Policy Document should be understood as an interpretation of any of the principles and provisions of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and of the Paris Agreement adopted under it,
8. Adopts the 2023 "Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage", as recommended by consensus by the Open-ended Working Group and contained in Document WHC/23/24.GA/INF.8;
9. Encourages the States Parties, the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies and World Heritage-related Category 2 Centres to disseminate widely the "Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage" through appropriate means to the World Heritage community and the broader public, including in local languages, and to promote its implementation;
10. Recalls the World Heritage Committee's requests, regarding the implementation of the Policy Document, addressed to the World Heritage Centre jointly with the Advisory Bodies, and within the available resources, to:

- a) *Elaborate proposals for specific changes to the Operational Guidelines necessary to translate the principles of this Policy Document into actual operational procedures, and to develop education and capacity-building initiatives to enable a wide implementation of this Policy Document,*
- b) *Consider preparing a Guidance Document to facilitate effective implementation of, and support for, the actions, goals and targets of this Policy Document, which could include indicators and benchmarking tools for measuring and reporting progress towards achieving the World Heritage Climate Action Goals,*

provided the above be undertaken in consultation with States Parties;

- 11. *Calls on States Parties to support the above-mentioned activities through extrabudgetary funding;*
- 12. *Recommends that States Parties and all stakeholders of the Convention integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation actions in risk preparedness policies and action plans, in order to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of all World Heritage properties, in line with the "Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage";*
- 13. *Also recommends that World Heritage-related Category 2 Centres and UNESCO Chairs prioritize issues related to the implementation of the "Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage" within their capacity-building and research initiatives;*
- 14. *Requests the World Heritage Centre to present to the General Assembly, at its 26th session, a report on the progress made in the implementation of the Policy Document and the above provisions.*