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**CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF
THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION
OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**

**Extended forty-fifth session
Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
10 – 25 September 2023**

**Item 7 of the Provisional Agenda:
State of conservation of World Heritage properties**

Summary

This document presents a global and analytical overview of Item 7 on the state of conservation of the World Heritage properties.

The document is composed of two main parts. After an Introduction (Part I), it presents progress achieved in a number of statutory matters related to Reactive Monitoring (Part II) and a focus on other conservation issues (Part III), which might have strategic or policy implications.

Draft Decisions: 45 COM 7.1 and 45 COM 7.2, see point IV

Table of Contents

- I. INTRODUCTION..... 2**
 - A. WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES REPORTED ON AT THE EXTENDED 45TH SESSION 2
 - B. THREATS AFFECTING THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES REPORTED ON AT THE EXTENDED 45TH SESSION..... 3
 - C. INFORMATION ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES..... 3
 - D. SELECTION OF THE WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES TO BE PROPOSED FOR DISCUSSION..... 4

- II. STATUTORY MATTERS RELATED TO REACTIVE MONITORING 5**
 - A. IMPROVING THE PERCEPTION OF THE LIST OF WORLD HERITAGE IN DANGER ... 5
 - B. CLIMATE ACTION FOR WORLD HERITAGE 8

- III. CONSERVATION ISSUES..... 9**
 - A. EMERGENCY SITUATIONS RESULTING FROM CONFLICTS..... 9
 - B. RECOVERY AND RECONSTRUCTION 14
 - C. KUNMING-MONTREAL GLOBAL BIODIVERSITY FRAMEWORK 18
 - D. URBAN PRESSURES 20
 - E. INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT..... 23
 - F. CORPORATE SECTOR AND THE WORLD HERITAGE 'NO-GO' COMMITMENT 25
 - G. WORLD HERITAGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED ISSUES 26
 - H. EARTH OBSERVATION AND SPATIAL DATA FOR WORLD HERITAGE CONSERVATION 27

- IV. DRAFT DECISIONS 28**

I. INTRODUCTION

A. World Heritage properties reported on at the extended 45th session

1. As part of the Reactive Monitoring process¹, the World Heritage Committee will examine at its 45th session, the reports on the state of conservation of **260** World Heritage properties (Agenda items 7A and 7B), including the 55 properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger (Agenda item 7A). In addition, due to specific situations, and as decided by the Committee during previous sessions, **three** general decisions, concerning the World Heritage properties of Iraq, the World Heritage properties of Syrian Arab Republic and the World Heritage properties of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, will also be examined under Agenda item 7A.
2. The properties reported upon are selected, among all those inscribed on the World Heritage List, according to the following considerations:
 - 55 properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger (Agenda item 7A) and for which reports have to be reviewed annually by the Committee, in conformity with Paragraph 190 of the Operational Guidelines);
 - 185 properties inscribed on the World Heritage List for which state of conservation reports were requested by the World Heritage Committee at its previous sessions (Agenda item 7B);
 - 20 additional properties that have also come under threat since the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee in 2021 (Agenda item 7B);
 - For 16 properties out of these 185, a follow-up was requested by the World Heritage Committee upon their inscription on the World Heritage List.
3. The 260 properties for examination are distributed as follows:

Agenda item 7A	NAT	CLT	Total
AFR	11	4	15
ARB	0	23	23
APA	2	4	6
EUR/NA	1	4	5
LAC	2	4	6
Total	16	39	55

Agenda item 7B	NAT	MIX	CLT	total
AFR	14	4	19	37
ARB	3	2	19	24
APA	19	1	34	54
EUR/NA	16	2	44	62
LAC	10	2	16	28
Total	62	11	132	205

¹For further details on this process, please visit the dedicated page on the World Heritage Centre's online State of conservation Information System at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/reactive-monitoring>.

B. Threats affecting the World Heritage properties reported on at the extended 45th session

4. The 260 properties for which a state of conservation report is presented are facing a number of factors, which negatively impact, or may impact, their Outstanding Universal Value (OUV). Rather than any single factor, the properties are impacted by several different factors. On average, 4 to 5 different factors (4.6) affect each of these properties, which emphasizes once more the cumulative impact of threats on the OUV.
5. Globally, the most reported factors affecting the properties continue to be the following ones: inadequate Management systems/ management plan; Housing; Tourism-related activities; Impacts of transportation infrastructures; Illegal activities; Legal framework; War and Civil unrest; Mining, oil and gas exploitation/exploration as well as Climate change-related impacts.
6. However, factors affecting the World Heritage properties vary according to the category of heritage considered. The most reported factors affecting respectively natural and cultural properties, as identified in the state of conservation reports presented at the extended 45th session, as well as more detailed statistics, will be available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/soc> (click “Advanced search”; enter “from 2023”; click “Search”; then “Views”, and “Statistics”).
7. The following sections of the document present insights on specific factors, such as conflict situations, reconstruction, infrastructure development, or urban pressures.

C. Information on the state of conservation reports submitted by States Parties

8. A substantial number of reports were not received within the statutory deadlines of 1 December 2021, 1 February 2022, 1 December 2022 and 1 February 2023. For this extended 45th session, 88% of all the reports requested by the World Heritage Committee were received by the end of February 2023 and 95% by the end of March 2023. At the time of writing this document, 96% of all reports due have been received. It should however be noted with appreciation that this year again, most of the States Parties reports followed the statutory format included as Annex 13 of the Operational Guidelines. The respect of the format greatly improves the treatment of the information and facilitates the monitoring of the implementation of previous Committee decisions.
9. It should be noted however that delayed submission of the reports and/or late submission of additional information by the States Parties inevitably leads to less time available for dialogue between the States Parties, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies on the issues at stake. This year, States Parties have submitted to the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies a substantial amount of such additional documentation and information, sometimes at a very late point in the drafting process, which delays the production of the relevant working documents. Furthermore, late submissions lead to an increasing number of state of conservation (SOC) reports being included in the Addenda documents, thus reducing the time available for Committee members to review these reports before the Committee session.
10. Although the sharing of information on the state of conservation of World Heritage properties is crucial, States Parties should be reminded about Decision **35 COM 12B**, Paragraph 16, by which they were requested by the Committee to consider **refraining from providing additional information regarding State of conservation issues after the deadlines** indicated in the *Operational Guidelines*, as this information cannot be reviewed in due course.
11. The World Heritage Centre would also like to acknowledge that out of all reports received, 65% have been made fully accessible to the public at http://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/45com/documents/#state_of_conservation_reports

with the agreement of the States Parties concerned. The online availability of such an important number of complete state of conservation reports greatly contributes to the transparency of the Reactive Monitoring process and States Parties should be commended for allowing such online publication.

D. Selection of the World Heritage properties to be proposed for discussion

12. In 2003, the World Heritage Committee requested (Decision **27 COM 7B.106.3**) that the state of conservation (SOC) reports should be presented to the Committee according to the two following categories:
 - Reports with recommended decisions which, in the judgment of the World Heritage Centre in consultation with the Advisory Bodies, require discussion by the World Heritage Committee,
 - Reports which, in the judgment of the World Heritage Centre, in consultation with the Advisory Bodies, can be noted without discussion.
13. Since the adoption of this decision, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies had been refining the selection process taking into account the procedures and statutory deadlines as set out in the *Operational Guidelines*, the different monitoring tools at the disposal of the World Heritage Committee, the ever-growing number of properties to report on at each Committee session, as well as the recommendation of the evaluation of the Reactive Monitoring process (see Chapter I.C. of Document [WHC/19/43.COM/7](#)) that the SOC reports presented to the Committee, “including those “opened” for discussion, should be based on clear and objective criteria, including the level and urgency of the threat to the property, and also whether or not the site is on the Danger List, rather than being based on geographic representativeness.”
14. As a result, the World Heritage Committee, at its 43rd session (Baku, 2019), supported the proposal by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies to only propose for discussion the following SOC reports, as well as the current practice allowing Committee members to add to this list the reports they wish to discuss (Decision **43 COM 7.1**):
 - If removal of the property from the List of World Heritage in Danger is proposed,
 - If inscription of the property on the List of World Heritage in Danger is proposed,
 - If deletion of the property from the World Heritage List is proposed.
15. Therefore, the process for the selection of SOC reports for discussion at any given Committee session shall preferably be as follows:
 - a) **Four weeks** prior to the opening of the Committee session, if possible, the list of the SOC reports proposed for discussion by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies (as per criteria detailed in paragraph 14 above) will be shared with all States Parties to the *Convention* (Document WHC/23/45.COM/INF.7);
 - b) **Sufficient time** in advance of the Committee session, Committee members –and **only Committee members**²– may add to this list the reports they also wish to discuss, providing that, in line with Decision **43 COM 7.1**:
 - i) A written request is made to the Chairperson of the Committee, through the World Heritage Centre,
 - ii) The reason why the additional report needs to be opened for discussion is clearly indicated in the request;

² Requests emanating from States Parties non-member of the Committee will not be taken into account.

- c) At least 10 days prior to the opening of the Committee session, the list of SOC reports to be discussed shall be closed and immediately made available to all States Parties (Document WHC/23/45.COM/INF.7 Rev);
- d) During the Committee session, the Chairperson shall directly give the floor to the Committee member, which requested a specific SOC report to be discussed, to explain the reason why it wished to discuss the report.

II. STATUTORY MATTERS RELATED TO REACTIVE MONITORING

A. Improving the perception of the List of World Heritage in Danger

Note: This Section should be read in conjunction with the results of this independent Study, available on a World Heritage Centre's webpage dedicated to the List of World Heritage in Danger, at the following web address: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/158/>.

16. Since a couple of years, debates at the World Heritage Committee highlight that the List of World Heritage in Danger (LWHD) is unfortunately often perceived as a sanction, and that, inscription on this List is not perceived in the same way by all States Parties concerned; with some applying for the inscription of a property to focus international attention on its problems and to obtain expert assistance in solving them while others wishing to avoid such inscription by all means.
17. The Committee decided to formally address this issue and hence called for a "*better understanding of the implications and benefits of properties being inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, and to develop appropriate information material in this regard with a view to overcome the negative perceptions of the List of World Heritage in Danger*" (Decision **40 COM 7**).
18. To address this issue, the World Heritage Centre developed a project with the objective to conduct an overall reflection and study on the image/perception of the LWHD. A contractor with expertise in strategic marketing, branding and communication has been identified ("Beyond Borders Media") and tasked with investigating the reasons why a negative perception overshadows the LWHD, as well as suggesting ways forward to change the mindset towards the LWHD into a more positive perception. This activity has benefitted from the generous support of the State Party of the Norway (see page <http://whc.unesco.org/en/partners/381/>).
19. The methodology for the independent Study included data and information gathering through a desk review of statutory texts, working and information documents, webpages and Committee' decisions as well as prior studies on the topic. The Contractor also undertook a total of 30 in-depth interviews with the Secretariat, the Advisory Bodies, State Party and civil society representatives, Committee members and experts, as needed, ensuring as far as possible that the interviewees form a geographically and gender balanced group, also representing all categories of properties (cultural/natural). An online survey was also addressed to all stakeholders of the Convention, in which 220 respondents took part.
20. The Study seeks to understand the dynamics of the List of World Heritage in Danger through the eyes of its fans and detractors alike and provide a snapshot of how it is being understood, misunderstood, used, underused, appreciated, or criticized. The overall goal is to use this knowledge to launch a new beginning for this essential element of the World Heritage Convention.
21. The Study entitled "*New Visions for the List of World Heritage in Danger*" presents insights into the role and reputation of the LWHD and looks at current discussions on this List, including general attitudes on its role and efficacy, highlighting that, even if as a

concept, the LWHD is perceived as an excellent tool for conservation and awareness-raising, it is however clearly facing a range of challenges.

22. The results presented in this Study echo the many voices and multiple perspectives that have been considered throughout the research process, and reflect their impressions, frustrations, and hopes for the future of the LWHD. The Study concludes with a series of five recommendations on communication approaches to raise the profile of the LWHD as a positive tool, crucial for the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage properties. These recommendations call for *“fresh perspectives on dealing with endangered heritage”* and emphasize that *“the LWHD can be a powerful lever of change, spurring action, starting a conversation, inspiring cooperation and opening up channels of resources and mutual support”*.
23. Full details for each recommendation, with its aims, communication channels, target audiences and approaches, are presented in Section 6 of the Study at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/158/>. Their main objectives can be summarized as follows:

a) Recommendation 1: “Change the narrative through positive storytelling and proactive, strategic communications”

Context: The LWHD is currently operating under a cloud of negative perceptions and is no longer seen as a positive conservation tool, but more as a ‘red list’. Apart from a range of political, geopolitical, economic and environmental considerations, one reason for this may be that it has been viewed more as a ‘zero-sum’ game since the first actual deletion of a property from the World Heritage List altogether in 2007. The Study showed that it is widely acknowledged that there is often massive momentum and huge efforts rallied by countries in avoiding the dreaded Danger-listing. Media portrayal is also an important factor in the negative perception of the LWHD, as resistance to Danger-listing is far more widely reported than the beneficial outcomes that can result from such listing. The fact that the decisions are being made by an Intergovernmental Committee and that World Heritage is a system of international cooperation can get lost in this type of narrative.

Objectives	Aims
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refocus the LWHD as a unified global approach to tackling urgent conservation needs at natural and cultural sites valued by all humanity • Incentivize the LWHD • Defuse the ‘danger’ while retaining the urgency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrate LWHD successes on a public stage • Take stock of current media strategy and footprint specifically related to the LWHD • Involve all stakeholders in communications • Emphasize that World Heritage processes are participatory and based on international cooperation

b) Recommendation 2: “Turn up the volume on youth voices”

Context: Communications should focus more on reaching youth and empowering youth to drive the messages for the World Heritage Convention’s mission. At a time in history when the youth of the world fear for their future and are calling their governments to account for jeopardizing the natural world, their role in driving action and advocating change is crucial. More explicit communications efforts would bring more youth voices into World Heritage conversation, harnessing their power as drivers of change. The World Heritage Convention is built around the concept of stewardship for the future, with States Parties recognizing “that the duty

of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage”. Communication strategies should aim at communicating the LWHD as a significant conservation tool for a better future.

Objectives	Aims
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Place youth at the centre of communications strategies as audience and conveyors of messages about the efficacy and importance of LWHD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of the conservation aims of the LWHD Increase youth involvement in World Heritage conservation

c) Recommendation 3: “Clear, meaningful, and transparent messages”

Context: The Study showed that there are problematic issues at the centre of the LWHD, which could benefit from direct communication approaches. Although there is a great deal of consensus amongst stakeholders about the issues at play, many of these topics can only be expressed in clear terms in the context of anonymous surveys or interviews. In order to achieve positive change, there is a need to collectively ‘face’ some of these issues and open more of a debate. Whilst this is a very delicate process, there are some aspects where this can be initiated in terms of communications.

Objectives	Aims
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt a ‘direct’ approach to issues surrounding the LWHD in certain areas Open a transparent debate amongst key stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Address difficult topics transparently Clear, accessible and meaningful information for World Heritage decision makers

d) Recommendation 4: “Promote contextualized, localized and participatory communication on List of World Heritage in Danger”

Context: The Study has shown that there is often a sense of alienation amongst people involved in World Heritage and affected by LWHD and ‘the bigger picture’. This sense of not being involved or heard enough exists at all levels. In order to ‘decentralize’ the discussions and create meaningful change, a more ‘webbed’ approach to communication should be taken. Stakeholders at all levels can co-create, convey and shape World Heritage and endangered heritage messaging. Telling stories that reflect a wide diversity of themes, issues, views and are told from different perspectives and in different languages will invigorate discussions on World Heritage, give stakeholders a sense of agency and remind decision-makers of the grassroots impacts of their work.

Objectives	Aims
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at the impacts of LWHD through a local lens Clarify how different contexts play a role in the LWHD decision-making Promote a multi-perspective view of LWHD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decentralize World Heritage discourses Drive local and grassroots discussions on World Heritage Localize expertise

e) **Recommendation 5: “Back to basics’ messaging”**

Context: The idea of ‘threats’ is woven into the fabric of the World Heritage Convention, as expressed in its very first words: “*Noting that the cultural heritage and the natural heritage are increasingly threatened with destruction*”. According to the findings of this Study, the essential purpose of the World Heritage Convention, of protecting the OUV, is being somewhat eclipsed by other interests. Other findings address the need to ‘refocus’ the conversation, strong communication strategies are needed, which can emphasize the need to ‘look back to move forward’.

Objectives	Aims
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus attention on Conservation as the heart of the World Heritage Convention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refocus World Heritage discussions on Conservation as opposed to Nomination • Provide further debates to address some unclear aspects of the Danger-listing process • Raise the profile of LWHD as an essential and positive mechanism • Promote resource mobilization

24. The Study, “*New Visions for the List of World Heritage in Danger*” highlights the achievements and benefits of the LWHD and the need to invigorating its use and restoring it as an active and effective mechanism. It also underlines that, above all, the LWHD needs to mobilize funds and resources, but also political will and a positive spirit of cooperation, as an effective conservation mechanism ultimately impacts how well our cultural and natural heritage can be protected.

B. Climate action for World Heritage

25. At its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021), the World Heritage Committee endorsed the updated Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage (see Decision **44 COM 7C**) and 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 to consult World Heritage Committee members, especially concerning the fundamental principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC); the alignment of climate change mitigation actions with the CBDR-RC and the Nationally Determined Contributions as well as the need for support and capacity-building assistance, the encouragement of technology transfer and financing from developed to developing countries. The Committee also requested that the updated draft Policy Document be transmitted for review and adoption at the 23rd session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, in November 2021. Furthermore, the Committee requested the World Heritage Centre to convene a Panel of experts, with experts drawn from the ad-hoc Working Group, the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies and other qualified experts in the field of climate science and heritage.
26. Following the Committee Decision, States Parties members of the World Heritage 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 (<https://whc.unesco.org/document/190260>) in view of its presentation to the General Assembly at its 23rd session.

27. The General Assembly took note of the Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage, as endorsed by the World Heritage 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 (see Resolution [23 GA 11](#)). The General Assembly also requested that this final version of Policy Document be presented for consideration by its 24th session in 2023. In addition, the General Assembly recommended that the Panel of experts requested by the Committee (see 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.
28. An inception meeting of the Open-ended Working Group took place online on 22 March 2022 and was the occasion to provide background information on this matter to all States Parties. The Bureau of the Open-ended Working Group is 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.
29. Furthermore, the Panel of experts requested by the Committee took place online, from 30 March 2022 to 1 April 2022 and was organized by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, with the assistance of the Advisory Bodies, and moderated by the Secretariat. It included 26 experts and 13 observers from all regions and from the Advisory Bodies and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Ms. Abena WHITE (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines) served as Rapporteur of the Panel of experts. The Policy Document was reviewed by the experts, section by section and the unresolved policy matters were discussed through an open discussion, as recommended by the General Assembly at its 23rd session (UNESCO, 2021). The final Report of this Panel of experts was shared by email with all States Parties on 29 June 2022.
30. As recommended by the General Assembly, the Panel of experts consequently reported on its work to the Open-ended Working Group on 16 September 2022. The members of the Open-ended Working Group also adopted their working methodology and expected results and agreed on a detailed schedule; meetings were consequently held in November 2022, January, March, May and July 2023. The meetings focused on reviewing the text of the revised Policy Document, working on the consolidated version stemming from the Panel of experts, and focusing only on the paragraphs opened for discussion.
31. The Secretariat has facilitated the work of the Open-ended Working Group, thanks to the generous support of the States Parties of Australia, Azerbaijan and the Netherlands for the organization of the meetings of the Open-ended Working Group and of the Panel of experts.

III. CONSERVATION ISSUES

A. Emergency situations resulting from conflicts

32. Conflict (including armed conflict and civil unrest) continues to represent a major threat to World Heritage properties. It remains one of the major reasons why properties have been inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Half of the 55 properties currently inscribed on List of World Heritage in Danger were included due, among other causes, to the potential or ascertained impacts of conflicts, and conflict situations have arisen subsequently for some of the other properties on that List. The vulnerability of such cultural and natural heritage to inadequate safeguarding measures has become even more concerning as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

33. In Sudan, the conflict that erupted in April 2023 has impacted communities and all sectors of society, which may lead to reduced management and protection capacities, and thus put heritage at risk of damage, looting and neglect. To date, no information on any direct impact on the three World Heritage properties and Tentative List sites in Sudan has been reported. Nevertheless, this situation is of great concern, particularly with regard to the serial properties Gebel Barkal and the Sites of the Napatan Region, with one of its component sites located around 5 km from an area that reportedly witnessed clashes in the beginning of the conflict.
34. Other World Heritage properties in the Arab States continue to be affected by armed conflict and instability, such as in Syria and Yemen. This has led to large-scale damage of some sites and urban areas, presenting a challenge in cultural heritage recovery, amidst the necessity of providing basic adequate services for inhabitants.
35. In Yemen, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (April 2023), it is estimated that two-thirds of the population (21.6 million) are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection services due to the prevailing situation. In some areas, the conflict has resulted in large-scale destruction of housing precincts and has impacted infrastructure. Natural hazards, such as cyclones and floods have exacerbated the situation, threatening the country's cultural and natural heritage, including its World Heritage properties, such as the Old City of Sana'a, and sites on the Tentative List. The natural property Socotra Archipelago continues to face capacity limitations due to the ongoing conflict.
36. With the return of stability to several areas of Iraq and Libya, a number of protection and conservation efforts are being undertaken by the concerned States Parties at World Heritage properties. In addition, the States Parties are progressively proceeding with the development of corrective measures and the definition of the Desired state of conservation for the removal of properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR), in collaboration with the World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS, following the process that has been developed for some cultural properties subject to security concerns related to armed conflicts.
37. International Assistance through the World Heritage Fund has been provided to address the priority issues at Syrian properties. However, some sites remain inaccessible, and hence their condition is unknown with no effective means of extending support or commencing remedial actions. These challenges have been exacerbated by the impact of the 7.8-Magnitude earthquake that struck Türkiye and Syria in February 2023, inflicting substantial damage. Damage has been reported at the Ancient City of Aleppo, Crac des Chevaliers and Qal'at Salah El-Din, and Ancient Villages of Northern Syria. In partnership with UNOSAT/UNITAR, UNESCO has assessed new damage to cultural sites in Syria as a result of the earthquake via satellite imagery. An initial technical field assessment mission by the Beirut Field Office has also taken place from 24 to 27 February to assess damage to cultural sites located in the Ancient city of Aleppo. UNESCO led the culture chapter of the Syria Earthquake Recovery Needs Assessment (SERNA) conducted by the UN country team which will serve as a roadmap for post-disaster recovery. SERNA was finalized in April and presented on 8 May 2023 by the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) during the meeting "Post Earthquake Dialogue: SERNA Presentation" convening the United Nations Country Team as well as existing and potential partners working in Syria. It was noted that 2,761 cultural assets were damaged, the estimated recovery need for cultural heritage is prominent with the amount of USD1,143,000,000. An Earthquake Recovery and Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (ER-DRR) was also presented. The ICOMOS Working Group on the Safeguarding of Cultural Heritage in Syria and Iraq continues to monitor conservation challenges and activities. Active participation in international meetings has led to the production of new publications and web recordings.

38. In the Africa Region, several natural World Heritage properties continue to be affected by the direct and indirect impacts of armed conflicts and civil unrest. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic, the security situation is improving gradually in certain areas, allowing for a significant increase in patrol coverage by the respective park staff in several natural properties.
39. However, the reported security situation is deteriorating again in eastern DRC, with the renewed emergence of armed groups. Specifically, Virunga National Park is affected by a resurgence in insecurity, with a large part of the park situated in areas controlled by armed groups. On-going conflict has tragically resulted in further deaths, including of park rangers with two guards at Virunga National Park killed in May 2023, and has impacted the management capacity. The UNESCO Rapid Response Facility (RRF) provided USD 40,000 emergency support to establish a community driven emergency programme to protect the park's mountain gorillas.
40. The reported security situation is also deteriorating further with the presence of armed groups operating in the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex (Benin, Burkina Faso, Niger). At first, this situation affected the Burkina Faso and Niger components of the property, resulting in the evacuation of management staff of the components located in Burkina Faso. Since the last session of the Committee, insecurity has also resulted in park staff being forced to abandon the component in Niger and several attacks on park staff and army personnel stationed in the Benin component of the property. This has resulted in loss of life and the rise of poaching and other illegal activities seriously hampering management activities. The RRF provided two emergency grants to support the Benin and Niger components of the property with a total amount of USD 80,000 to ameliorate the situation. With the support of the Norway Fund, UNESCO facilitated a national consultation workshop in Niger in May 2023 to develop a National Action Plan to support the management of the W-Arly-Pendjari Complex.
41. Poaching and illegal logging are often closely linked to conflict, and the presence of armed groups and their impacts may extend to countries not directly affected by armed conflict. As these activities are highly lucrative, organized crime and criminal groups are increasingly involved. Further efforts are needed to contain illegal wildlife trade and illegal timber trade syndicates, including through cooperation with the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), including through the signature of a new MoU between UNESCO and CITES on 26 June 2023 (see Document WHC/23/45.COM/5A).
42. With regard to cultural heritage, the impact of armed conflict and the presence of armed groups in West Africa has decreased, but the situation in Burkina Faso continues to pose persistent threats. The security situation resulting from inter-community conflicts in and around the mixed property Cliff of Bandiagara (Land of the Dogons) (Mali) has however improved. UNESCO is partnering with the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH) with a view to strengthening the protection of the site, as well as of the Tomb of the Askia. Beyond Mali, work with ALIPH is also being carried out in Afghanistan at the Archaeological Remains of Jam and in Iraq at the House of Prayer in Mosul.
43. In Ethiopia, the Aksum World Heritage property and the Tentative List site of the Sacred Landscapes of Tigray are situated in the Tigray region where conflict broke out in 2020. UNESCO monitored the situation on the ground in close consultation with the UNESCO Field Office in Addis Ababa and the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH) of Ethiopia. This armed conflict spread to the city of Lalibela where the World Heritage property of the Rock-Hewn Churches is located. In order to address urgent needs to ensure the safeguarding of the property, the Culture Sector developed an emergency response to enhance protective measures within the property. On 7 January 2022, UNESCO Addis Ababa Office conducted a first information mission to

Lalibela to meet local and management authorities as well as local communities. In addition, under its Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF), UNESCO dispatched an assessment mission from 15 to 21 May 2022 to assess the state of conservation of the Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela and to formulate urgent actions with direct involvement of local actors and communities. Building on the result of the mission, a risk management plan for Lalibela was developed which outlines priorities for protection and protocols for evacuation of movable heritage in the context of armed conflicts and disasters. A capacity building workshop "Fighting against the illicit trafficking of cultural objects, protection, mitigation and recovery in emergencies", was organized from 24 to 28 October 2022 in cooperation with the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT) and the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL), with the participation of 32 national and regional experts. Educational and advocacy materials targeting local experts and communities were also developed to raise wider awareness. The conflict also has reportedly affected the Simien National Park World Heritage property, with a site used as a military base, which received a conservation grant from the UNESCO Rapid Response Facility (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/rapidresponse/>) to support the clean-up effort of the military debris.

44. In the Asia and the Pacific region, the situation in Afghanistan with its two properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, remains a great concern in terms of conservation. After the period of halting the field operations since August 2021, and with the recent agreements from major donors, the projects for the stabilisation of the western Buddha niche at Bamiyan and works relating to mural paintings at Shahr-i Ghulghulah could be resumed shortly. UNESCO, through its Office in Kabul, monitors closely the field situation, including the uncontrolled excavations, inappropriate use of the area in archaeologically sensitive zones and urban developments.
45. UNESCO, under its HEF, conducted a comprehensive inventory of all the archaeological and other cultural objects that remained in three storages at the World Heritage property Cultural Landscape and Archaeological Remains of the Bamiyan Valley, Afghanistan, and provided emergency conservation to the materials in most need. These objects were then properly labelled, packed, and transported to the Bamiyan Cultural Centre (BCC) and stored. In addition, shelving and other storage equipment was also acquired for the BCC and installed within their premises. At the same time, a rapid assessment of the eight sites comprising the property as well as other relevant heritage sites within Bamiyan, was also conducted to assess their preservation status and, in the case of the sites within the World Heritage property, the maintenance of their OUV.
46. In terms of the vulnerability of properties to potential looting and illicit trafficking of cultural objects, UNESCO, notably through the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the 1970 Convention and the 1954 Convention and its two Protocols, continues to pursue its follow-up to the implementation of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions related to cultural heritage protection, humanitarian and security considerations, in particular Resolutions 2199, 2253 and 2347.
47. Since the outbreak of the armed conflict in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the heritage of the country has been under direct threat or suffered damage and destruction. UNESCO has underlined the obligations under international humanitarian law, notably the 1954 *Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* and its two (1954 and 1999) Protocols, to refrain from inflicting damage to cultural property, and condemned all attacks and damage to cultural heritage in all its forms in Ukraine. UNESCO has also called for the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 2347.
48. The war significantly raises the level of threat to Ukraine's properties, especially those located in big cities such as Kyiv, L'viv and Odesa. All three cities have suffered physical damage in the buffer zone of the World Heritage property, while in Odesa buildings of

major cultural importance located within the perimeter of the property have been affected. The cities of Chernihiv and Kharkiv, where properties on Ukraine's Tentative List are located, have suffered significant destruction.

49. Within the framework of the UNESCO Action Plan for Culture in Ukraine, the World Heritage Centre, in close cooperation with ICOMOS and ICCROM, is strengthening Ukraine's capacity to undertake urgent protection of cultural heritage and to engage in recovery, notably through the development of emergency preparedness and mitigation plans for properties inscribed on the World Heritage List and for sites on Ukraine's Tentative List (also see Document WHC/23/45.COM/5A). Thanks to the support of the UNESCO-Japan Funds-in-Trust, two sites are receiving special attention: the World Heritage property 'Kyiv: St Sophia Cathedral and Associated Monastic Buildings, Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra' and the historic centre of Chernihiv (part of which is included on Ukraine's Tentative List). In the same framework, monitoring of cultural sites in Ukraine – including World Heritage properties and sites on Ukraine's Tentative List, as well as six priority cities – is carried out in partnership with UNITAR/UNOSAT and will be upscaled with in-situ assessment of a selected number of damaged cultural properties.
50. UNESCO continues its efforts to support the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy (MoCIP) of Ukraine in coordinating international initiatives, including for the urgent securing and stabilisation of immovable cultural heritage. Following the detailed findings of the Culture chapter of the Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA2), jointly conducted by the Ukrainian Government, the World Bank, the UN and the European Union, UNESCO has established thematic working groups, including the Advisory Bodies to the World Heritage Committee among others, to facilitate the next steps in safeguarding Ukraine's cultural heritage, in particular through a joint Action Plan for Culture in Ukraine for 2023 and beyond. UNESCO facilitated the delivery of a high-resolution scanner, donated by the Government of Austria and the Diözesanarchiv St. Pölten, to the National Preserve 'Kyiv-Pechersk Lavra' for books, manuscripts and archives, in direct response to the needs expressed by the site managers in July 2022. In the Kyiv region, UNESCO is also providing security and conservation equipment and urgent repair works to four cultural museums. In the recently inscribed World Heritage property 'The Historic Centre of Odesa', with the support of the Heritage Emergency Fund, UNESCO completed urgent repairs to the Odesa Fine Arts Museum, is supporting the marking of cultural sites with the Blue Shield emblem to facilitate their identification (54 sites to date), and has provided technical and material support to the Odesa Regional Administration for in situ protection of cultural properties, including monuments and sculptures in public spaces, as well as reinforcing the security of museums in the city. UNESCO launched the first phase of a project for the digital transformation of the culture sector in Ukraine and is strengthening the capacities of journalists to report and document damage to cultural heritage, including World Heritage. A Culture hub, based in L'viv, is being established to facilitate capacity-building activities linked to culture for culture professionals, local communities and civil society organisations, in connection with UNESCO Conventions in the field of Culture, including the 1972 World Heritage Convention.
51. ICOMOS has been closely monitoring the situation in Ukraine and has provided a variety of assistance ranging from advice and capacity building on monitoring and documentation to the provision of funding and equipment, including the supply of fire extinguishers, in order to contribute towards the safeguarding of Ukrainian properties and the implementation of effective crisis management and risk assessment measures.
52. ICCROM, through its flagship programme on First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis (FAR), in partnership with the Maidan Museum and the Heritage Emergency Response Initiative (HERI), organized a two-day online workshop in April 2022 on developing a collaborative damage and risk assessment methodology for heritage sites damaged or at risk of destruction. ICCROM is continuing to work on

other potential capacity building activities in collaboration with the MoCIP of Ukraine and other potential partners. The ICCROM/UNESCO manual on Endangered Heritage: Emergency Evacuation of Heritage Collections has been translated into Ukrainian and UNESCO has supported the distribution of some 2,000 printed copies across Ukraine. The “First Aid to Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis – Handbook and Toolkit” are also currently in translation in collaboration with the Prince Claus Fund.

53. In July 2022, ICCROM's FAR Programme undertook a joint mission to Ukraine with ICOMOS and ALIPH to assess the situation on the ground, support the efforts made by the MoCIP of Ukraine, as well as heritage organizations and professionals in the country. In response to the findings of the mission and the needs identified after the workshop, FAR developed a web and mobile-based application that can be used both online and offline to systematically gather damage and risk data post-emergencies. The app has been customized for and field-tested at over 17 heritage places in Ukraine, the Philippines and Pakistan. Furthermore, the tailored damage and risk assessment form and methodology has helped verify damage data at over 300 cultural sites in Ukraine. Most recently, ICCROM and UNESCO staff members were appointed as members of the European Commission expert sub-group on “safeguarding cultural heritage in Ukraine.”

B. Recovery and Reconstruction

54. In its Decision **44 COM 7**, the World Heritage Committee welcomed the continuous reflection on the *Warsaw Recommendation on the Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage* (2018), the website dedicated to *Post-Conflict and Post-Disaster Reconstruction and Recovery* created by the World Heritage Centre, and various initiatives and projects, noted new and foreseen resources and publications, and strongly encouraged the documentation of heritage structures to serve as information source following disasters or conflicts. Among recent initiatives was the online conference organised by Poland on 24 November 2022 and aimed at promoting the *Warsaw Recommendation on the Recovery and Reconstruction of Cultural Heritage* as a point of departure for the recovery of cultural heritage in Ukraine.
55. The Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH) hosted the International Conference on Integrated Reconstruction and Post-trauma Impact on Communities and the Socio-Economic Aspects of Recovery (Manama, Bahrain/Online, 8-10 November 2021). The conference included contributions from UNESCO, ICOMOS, ICCROM, the World Bank and others, including site managers from properties where recovery and reconstruction projects have been or are being undertaken.
56. Several projects have been implemented by UNESCO in Yemen with the aim of addressing the safeguarding of properties inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger, including through the UNESCO Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF), as well as the EU-funded project “Cash for Work: Promoting livelihood opportunities for Urban Youth in Yemen” (EUR 9.7 million), and its second phase for 2022-2026, entitled “Youth Employment through Culture and Heritage in Yemen” (USD 22.5 million). The challenges in the recovery and reconstruction of this property are complex, due to the need to balance orderly repair and reconstruction with pressing social needs. The challenge for rehabilitation planning here is to reconcile the maintenance of housing and services for the living community with orderly and well-informed reconstruction of damaged precincts and buildings, based on survey and documentation, using traditional techniques and materials. Unregulated new construction and inadequate restoration continue to affect attributes which support the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property. Nevertheless, there have been some positive responses. The EU-funded projects, for instance promote livelihood opportunities for youth through urban regeneration, including traditional maintenance and restoration of buildings. A new project funded by Japan (January 2023 to January 2024, USD 925,925) “Building Climate-resilience communities

in Historical cities in Yemen through strengthened Disaster Risk Management and Awareness" for the Old City of Sana'a and the Old Walled City of Shibam, led by UNESCO Science Sector and the Doha Office also contributes to recovery in the World Heritage cities of Yemen.

57. Recovery and reconstruction efforts are also ongoing in Libya and Iraq. Rescue and reconstruction of all buildings within the Old Town of Ghadamès (Libya), which had been damaged by the torrential rains of December 2017, has been completed by the State Party, thus contributing to the implementation of corrective measures. In Iraq, the issue of limited resources has remained a prevailing challenge, though the State Party has succeeded in the mobilization of new partnerships.
58. Following the launch of the flagship initiative "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" in February 2018, UNESCO pursued its actions towards the rehabilitation and recovery of Iraq's cultural heritage, notably in the Old City of Mosul, an update of which is available in Document WHC/23/45.COM/7A.Add. Also, within the "Revive the Spirit of Mosul" initiative, ICCROM has been working on a programme for "Capacity Building for Holistic, Sustainable and Resilient Heritage Recovery of Mosul". The initiative, a partnership between ICCROM and UNESCO, that is being delivered in collaboration with the University of Mosul, is aimed both at conservation professionals and at crafts-persons.
59. Key highlights of UNESCO's Li Beirut Initiative, include the rehabilitation of 280 schools in Beirut, thanks to funding by the Qatar-based Education Above All Foundation and Education Cannot Wait, and of the iconic Sursock Museum that were all damaged during the port blast in August 2020. After the UNESCO-led rehabilitation project, funded by Italy (the Museum had received direct bilateral support for the first phase of rehabilitation by France and ALIPH), the Sursock Museum reopened its doors on 26 May 2023. The 3D technical documentation of the historic areas of Beirut, funded under the HEF, was completed in 2021, and a follow-up activity aimed at strengthening the technical capacities of the national authorities in processing the acquired data and models, as well as in operating the related equipment to support the reconstruction and recovery process is underway. On 27 April 2022, the UNESCO Regional Office in Beirut organized a workshop to set out a road-map for the reconstruction of Beirut after the port blast. UNESCO also completed a project with Beirut Urban Lab between July and November 2021 to define and set the criteria for identifying modern urban heritage within a framework of identified values and attributes with the support of the funds from ARC-WH, Bahrain. Subsequently, the modern urban heritage of a substantial part of the damaged areas has been mapped, providing a clearer view of the heritage of the area and supporting the completion of an action plan currently being prepared by the Institut Paris Region with the support of a local team of experts on behalf of UNESCO.
60. Stabilization work has been undertaken to safeguard the House of Wonders in the Stone Town of Zanzibar (United Republic of Tanzania). Online meetings were held with the State Party, the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICOMOS and ICCROM to discuss the stabilization design developed as the result of a UNESCO Advisory mission. With the Support of the Sultanate of Oman, UNESCO implement capacity building programme for site management authorities, stakeholders and communities to support effective management of the World Heritage property. In addition, the State Party (the Revolutionary Government of Zanzibar in the United Republic of Tanzania) has started the reconstruction work following the biliteral agreement between the two States Parties. UNESCO will conduct a mission in June 2023 to evaluate the progress of the implementation of the 2019 Reactive Monitoring mission.
61. On 5 and 6 February 2022, Madagascar was hit by tropical cyclone Batsiraï. The cyclone caused extensive damages to the country, including the natural World Heritage property of the 'Rainforests of the Atsinanana'. Two of the six components of the property, Ranomafana and Andringitra National Parks, were severely affected, as well as an

interpretation centre and a cottage. Through its HEF, UNESCO supported the initial recovery of the property and local communities, and conducted an assessment of the impact of the cyclone on the environment, the infrastructure, and local livelihoods, and provided equipment to urgently stabilize key sites to prevent further damage. In addition, practical recommendations for the park managers were provided to facilitate future resource mobilization and a comprehensive rehabilitation plan was developed for the interpretation centre. HEF also supported the implementation of training workshops on disaster risk management for the Island of Mozambique (Mozambique) which was affected by Cyclone Gombe in March 2022.

62. On 6 February 2022, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck in south-eastern Türkiye, near the Syrian border, severely impacting seven provinces in Türkiye and a large part in northern Syria and affecting over 9.1 million people. On 20 February, the district of Defne in Hatay was hit with a magnitude 6.4-magnitude earthquake. Several World Heritage properties are located in the affected provinces. According to information from the national authorities, the 'Diyarbakir Fortress and Hevsel Gardens Cultural landscape' suffered limited damage and the 'Arslantepe Mound' suffered the collapse of the temporary roof cover and slips in several adobe walls. UNESCO has been closely monitoring damage via satellite imagery to World Heritage sites and sites on the Tentative List through its partnership with UNITAR/UNOSAT. UNESCO is in close contact with Türkiye's Ministry of Culture and Tourism in order to find the best possible solution to assist and the Organization is contributing to the UN response for Türkiye under the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) leadership. In this context, UNESCO contributed to the Culture and Tourism Chapter of the Türkiye Earthquake Recovery and Reconstruction Assessment (TERRA), conducted by the Government of Türkiye with the support of UN, EU, and World Bank. TERRA was published on the SBB website and presented at the EU international donor's conference in Brussels on 20 March. While the assessment is still ongoing, it is estimated that the damage to the cultural assets and museums under the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism amounts to at least approximately 1 billion TRY (USD53 million).
63. The reconstruction of the Mazibu Azaala Mpanga (main tomb) at the Tombs of Buganda Kings at Kasubi (Uganda) is nearing completion after a decade of work. The project has reinvigorated traditional skills and the use of materials traditionally used in Ganda construction. The process was delayed by a scarcity of these materials. In 2022, UNESCO also provided emergency assistance through its HEF in the wake of the fire that had significantly affected the property in 2020. By contrast, in the Kathmandu Valley (Nepal) concerns continue that the introduction of new materials (such as addition of lime to mud mortar) and reconstruction of some buildings based on conjecture rather than evidence, erode the authenticity and integrity of the property. Furthermore, the State Party has installed the firefighting equipment and develop Risk Preparedness Plan. With the generous support of Norway Funds, UNESCO undertook the mission in May 2023 to support the State Party to develop guidelines for the management and development of the buffer zone, using the approach of the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban landscape.
64. The reconstruction and recovery from the damage caused by the 2015 Gorkha earthquake continues in Kathmandu Valley (Nepal), although hampered by a lack of resources and capacity. Both the impacts of the earthquake and the inadequacy of the response continue to threaten the property's integrity, authenticity and other attributes that support its OUV. Nevertheless, the decision not to demolish the Lal Baithak wing of the National Art Museum in Bhaktapur but rather restore is welcome, as it will safeguard important fabric authenticity. This represents a good example of how in-depth research is required before decision making, and how restoring the authentic of the urban fabric should always be the preferred option before demolition and reconstruction. The Kathmandu Valley would greatly benefit from the preparation of customised Recovery

Master Plans for each Protective Monument Zone of the property, as consistently requested by the Committee. In March 2023, UNESCO assisted the State Party of Nepal in organising the first meeting of the International Scientific Committee for the Kathmandu Valley World Heritage Property (ISC-KV) (23-24 March 2023, Kathmandu, Nepal). The ISC-KV has been established to support to the Government of Nepal in its efforts to protect the property and take stock of the post-disaster recovery. It aims to make sure the proactive engagement of the Nepali authorities, local government municipalities and site managers so that the recovery process not only maintains and protects the property but also works in partnership with the community that lives in, uses, values, and maintains the sites. At the end of this very first ISC-KV meeting, recommendations were adopted to respond to previous Committee decisions and the recommendations of the Reactive Monitoring missions, setting out a path for transition from post-disaster recovery to standard management.

65. Following the fire which broke out on 13 April 2020 at the Church of Milot, National History Park – Citadel, Sans Souci, Ramiers (Haiti), pre-fire technical documentation of the church was produced with the support of the UNESCO HEF and made available to national authorities. Further stabilization and recovery work, as well as the placement of monitoring devices to evaluate the structural stability of the surviving structures, were implemented.
66. On 26 and 27 September 2022, Hurricane Ian made landfall in Cuba, causing severe damage to the World Heritage property ‘Viñales Valley’ located in the province of Pinar del Río. The cultural complex, ‘House of Culture’, one of the oldest structures located on the main square of the property, was heavily damaged. With UNESCO HEF support, urgent restoration works for the complex were launched to ensure the continuity of cultural activities for local communities.
67. On 4 October 2022, a wildfire affected over 100 hectares of the World Heritage property ‘Rapa Nui National Park’ in Chile. The National Forestry Corporation (CONAF) estimated that more than 170 stone figures dating back as early as the 10th century – known as moai – were damaged by the fire. In response to the emergency, by mobilizing the HEF, UNESCO is supporting the development of a detailed fire damage assessment of the property; the development of a comprehensive preparedness and management plan for the property, in collaboration with the local communities; and the implementation of capacity-strengthening activities in heritage management and emergency preparedness for local authorities and stakeholders.
68. Pakistan suffered major monsoons in August 2022, which deluged much of the country, causing widespread displacement and social and economic impacts. The monsoons severely damaged both the terrain and individual elements of the World Heritage property ‘Historical Monuments at Makli, Thatta’, thereby exacerbating existing challenges with physical conservation, security and site management. The response to immediate threats has been substantive and effective, including augmentation of drainage and training of staff in emergency interventions. Emergency International Assistance under the World Heritage Fund was quickly mobilised for the two World Heritage properties heavily damaged in the province of Sindh, ‘Archaeological Ruins at Moenjodaro’ and ‘Historical Monuments at Makli, Thatta’ by sending two emergency missions to each site from October 2022 to March 2023. The technical reports recommended various actions, ranging from immediate repairs to the elaboration of a risk preparedness framework. Through the HEF, UNESCO also supported a Post-Disaster Needs Assessment, which assessed the damage to 149 cultural sites, including the two abovementioned World Heritage properties. However, this event and its consequences serve to highlight the need for comprehensive risk preparedness strategies and emergency response plans for World Heritage properties that are exposed to risk from natural disasters.

69. Tropical cyclone Mocha formed over the southern Bay of Bengal on 11 May and hit Myanmar, affecting the World Heritage property 'Bagan' and a site on the Tentative List of Myanmar. Damage assessments and response to immediate threats are ongoing at the time of writing this document.
70. As outlined in Paragraph 86 of the Operational Guidelines, recovery and reconstruction activities are recognised as important to the conservation of attributes that sustain the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of some World Heritage properties that have endured damage from extreme circumstances such as conflict, natural disaster or other major misadventure. In such situations, recovery and reconstruction may also be essential to sustaining the social fabric and livelihoods of the associated communities. However, it is critical for the integrity of World Heritage properties that reconstruction only occur in such exceptional circumstances and be well-informed, based on thorough documentation, guided by conservation plans and policies that support the OUV and detailed in Recovery Plans that are customised and responsive to the attributes of the property, its specific circumstances, and the affected communities. Such Recovery Plans should be evaluated through Impact Assessments as outlined in Paragraph 118bis of the Operational Guidelines.

C. Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

71. Following a four-year consultation and negotiation process, which was significantly delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) was adopted during the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) organised in December 2022 in Montreal, Canada. Through its 4 goals and 23 targets, the UN-backed GBF sets out the priority actions to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, and to ensure that, by 2050, the shared vision of living in harmony with nature is fulfilled. By decision 15/22 on Nature and Culture (multiple languages, available at <https://www.cbd.int/decisions/cop/?m=cop-15>) COP-15 also renewed the mandate of the Joint Programme of Work on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity.
72. The World Heritage Centre and IUCN have reported on their active engagement in the development of the GBF to past and current session of the Committee (see also documents WHC/23/45.COM/5A and WHC/23/45.COM/5B). By its Decisions **43 COM 5A**, **44 COM 5A** and **44 COM 7.2** the Committee has called on all States Parties to the Convention to actively engage in the preparation of the GBF, and invited States Parties and parties to the CBD to reflect the contribution of the World Heritage Convention to global biodiversity conservation, including through its integration within the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). At the time of preparing this report, the World Heritage Centre was updating the guidance on integrating the aims of the World Heritage Convention into NBSAPs. The COP-15 explicitly recognised the importance of cooperation and synergies between different Conventions, as well as the specific contributions of the biodiversity-related conventions, other relevant multilateral agreements and international organizations and processes in achieving the aims of the GBF. By Decision 15/13 it also invited them to formally endorse the GBF to support its operationalization. UNESCO and IUCN are participating in follow up dialogue on the opportunities to strengthen synergies with the GBF in relation to the World Heritage Convention and relevant UNESCO programmes at large.
73. In its Decision **44 COM 7.2**, the Committee further requested the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies to report back with recommended policies and actions to support the implementation of the GBF and the Joint Programme of Work on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity in the processes of the World Heritage Convention. The GBF includes several targets which are highly relevant to the World Heritage Convention, including those on effective and equitably governed protected

areas, protection and sustainable use of threatened and wild species, ensuring the provision of ecosystem functions and services including in urban areas, and applying a rights-based approach to biodiversity conservation, amongst others. Processes of the World Heritage Convention can support States Parties in implementing the GBF and their respective NBSAPs, for example through elaboration of Tentative Lists to identify areas of particular importance for biodiversity to support their international recognition and protection through the Convention, and by using reports on the state of conservation of properties and Committee's decisions to set priority management actions and allocate funding for already inscribed properties. Moreover, supporting for example the application of impact assessments in the World Heritage context, or implementing the Convention's policy provisions in World Heritage properties can simultaneously enhance the goals of GBF. The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies therefore recommend that a coordinated actions be identified and developed on World Heritage and the GBF, subject to the availability of resources, to better harness the World Heritage Convention in supporting the GBF, building on existing guidance and the recommendations of the expert meeting "Harnessing the power of World Heritage for a better future: World Heritage and the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework" (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2068/>) convened by IUCN together with Germany's Federal Office for Nature Conservation (BfN) and in cooperation with the World Heritage Centre.

74. UNESCO has been a partner to the Joint Programme of Work on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity together with the Secretariat of CBD since the inception of the programme in 2010. The COP-15 Decision 15/22 on Nature and Culture approves a renewed Joint Programme and encourages Governments and Parties to all the relevant conventions, including the World Heritage Convention and the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, and to be promoted by UNESCO, CBD Secretariat, IUCN, ICOMOS, and ICCROM, to contribute to its implementation through appropriate interagency-mechanisms, and involving a wide range of partners. The CBD Secretariat is coordinating the initial discussions on the possible elements and tasks of the joint programme of work as outlined in the annex document to the COP-15 decision. It is clear that there are a range of specific tasks and opportunities by which the processes of the World Heritage Convention and individual properties can contribute to the joint programme of work, and the potential to mobilise new channels for supporting biodiversity conservation through the stewardship of cultural sites, and the recognition of the leadership of Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities. UNESCO is also in the process of determining its overall flagship initiatives that contribute to the goal of the joint programme of work, through its work on education for sustainable development, the suite of Culture Conventions, UNESCO-designated sites including Biosphere Reserves, and local and indigenous knowledge systems, amongst others. This new Joint Programme will also be an important platform to further the collaboration between IUCN, ICOMOS and ICCROM and UNESCO, in the linkage of nature and culture in their wider programme, such as through the specific contributions of the World Heritage Leadership Programme and is historic in inviting the contributions of ICOMOS and ICCROM to the Convention on Biological Diversity for the first time.
75. It is to be noted that the elements of the Joint Programme of Work on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity, as well as the GBF more generally, are already broadly aligned with the 2015 Policy on the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the World Heritage Convention, which for example "recognise the close links and interdependence of biological diversity and local cultures within the socio-ecological systems of many World Heritage properties" and call on integrating "consideration for biological and cultural diversity as well as ecosystem services and benefits within the conservation and management of all World Heritage properties, including mixed and cultural ones". Follow up to the proposed strategy or actions on World Heritage and the GBF could be reflected in the Committee's future document

dedicated to World Heritage Convention and Sustainable Development, including the possible need to update the Policy, and to define and support implementation mechanisms to put it into effect.

D. Urban pressures

76. World Heritage properties in urban areas face a range of challenges arising from multiple and intersecting requirements for conservation of Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), while attending to the needs of contemporary communities and responding to issues that arise from urban development projects, including those for new infrastructure and transport. The Management Plans for urban heritage properties are often inadequate or outdated and not formally adopted. Different planning mechanisms operate within local authorities which are often separately established from heritage Management Plans without adequate coordination between them resulting in the heritage conservation agenda not being adequately integrated into urban development plans and processes. Hence, urban development plans and projects, whether they are commercial towers, metro lines, roads, or hotels, are often launched without regard for the heritage Management Plans and their potential impact on the OUV of the property. Flooding and other disasters, including several related to climate change, add further to the pressures in urban areas. In some instances, World Heritage inscription may increase both tourism and property values, thereby stimulating further development, which itself may threaten the OUV of the property.
77. Residents and business owners within urban World Heritage properties legitimately expect reasonable standards for basic municipal services and amenities and opportunities for making their livelihoods. While local governments should respond to the needs and aspirations of their urban communities in providing such services, amenities, and opportunities for livelihoods, they are also required to protect heritage consistent with Target 11.4 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which recognises the safeguarding of heritage is essential to make cities “inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable”.
78. Urban pressures not only impact historic cities and settlements but all heritage in and around cities and settlements. Commercial pressures and high value of real estate exacerbate the stresses of rapid change in and around World Heritage properties. Inadequately planned projects, or changes to planning and development controls, which enable or encourage inappropriate large-scale projects or undesirable incremental change, have the potential to erode the authenticity, integrity and other attributes of the OUV of World Heritage properties.
79. The Committee has previously emphasized the need to address urban pressures arising from development within World Heritage properties, their buffer zones and wider settings and that urban World Heritage properties should implement the *2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape* ([2011 Recommendation](#)) and its approach (Decisions **37 COM 12.II**, **39 COM 10B.3**, **41 COM 7**, and **44 COM 7.2**). The 2011 Recommendation is an important tool for managing heritage in urban areas and settlements as it calls for the integration of heritage conservation with urban development plans and processes and is implemented within the overall framework of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In 2021 and in 2022, UNESCO organised a number of activities as part of its 10th Anniversary celebrations of the 2011 Recommendation. A UNESCO [HUL Call for Action](#) was launched in 2021 to which during the 12 months following the HUL Call for Action, 145 cities, institutions and individuals have signed up to raise awareness about the 2011 Recommendation. Responses came from 59 countries from all regions of the world. The Call is still open and accepting responses. Many of the challenges noted in the preceding paragraphs could be addressed in the Management Plans of urban areas if they are aligned with the 2011 Recommendation approach and methodology from the very beginning. Furthermore, the

management plans should be anchored in urban development plans and processes and coordination mechanisms established (Decision **44 COM 7.2**). With regard to the Advisory Bodies, IUCN has completed and launched in 2023 the new IUCN Urban Nature Indexes (UNI). Comprising a set of 30 indicator topics nested across six themes, the UNI have been developed to help cities understand their impacts on nature, set science-based targets for improvement, and monitor progress accordingly. By shining a spotlight on the ecological performance of cities, the framework serves to enhance environmental transparency and accountability, facilitate goal setting and catalyse conservation action. Although not specific to World Heritage, the UNI provides a framework for all cities, including in addressing the ecologically focused elements of the HUL.

80. The World Heritage Centre, in consultation with the Advisory Bodies, has developed a digital tool, the “Urban Heritage Atlas” that uses GIS, visual analysis, and storytelling for cultural mapping and inventorying of urban heritage attributes. With a view to promoting good practices on heritage-based solutions for sustainable development the online platform “[World Heritage Canopy - Heritage Solutions for Sustainable Futures](#)”, has been developed on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre’s website to share case-studies, and complements the solutions platform PANORAMA Cities and Nature-Culture, coordinated by IUCN, ICCROM, ICOMOS and partners, which integrates World Heritage linked nature-based solutions across a range of themes. The Canopy platform features more than 60 case-studies on sustainable urban heritage conservation and management in historic cities and settlements providing examples of local implementation of the global principles of the 2011 Recommendation including strategies for heritage conservation in the face of urban pressures (These tools are discussed in further detail in Document WHC/23/45.COM/5D). These tools could help World Heritage properties in urban areas and settlements to better protect the OUV of the property while also advancing sustainable urban development.
81. Integrated approaches are invaluable to aligning inevitable urban change with retention of OUV, as stressed in 2017 by the World Heritage Committee in its Decision **41 COM 7**, in which it “highlight[ed] the importance of promoting integrated approaches that strengthen holistic governance, improve conservation outcomes and contribute to sustainable development”. Integrated approaches constitute a core focus of the work of the World Heritage Leadership Programme. The current revision of the *Resource Manual on Managing World Heritage (forthcoming)* together with the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies, aims to promote a place-based and people centred approach to management of World Heritage with an accompanying management effectiveness assessment toolkit for all World Heritage properties, *Enhancing Our Heritage Toolkit 2.0 (EOH 2.0)*.
82. The findings in the [Consolidated Report on the Third UNESCO Member States Consultation on the Implementation of the 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape - UNESCO World Heritage Centre](#), recently completed, clearly identified the importance of local authorities following more systematically the implementation of the 2011 Recommendation as a tool to manage urban heritage and for the framework to be better integrated in the monitoring and reporting on the state of conservation of World Heritage properties in urban areas (see also Document WHC/23/45.COM/5A and WHC/23/45.COM/5D).
83. Comprehensive and coordinated approaches are essential for integration of management systems for World Heritage properties into wider urban and regional planning and development plans, so that the coherent and co-ordinated protection of OUV, by all levels of government becomes a key aim in urban environments. A comprehensive plan such as the one proposed for Historic Cairo (Egypt) would be invaluable when fully completed and aligned with the 2011 Recommendation that would inform the rehabilitation of neighbourhoods and other urban development interventions.

Thorough inventories of urban heritage attributes beyond the key monuments are vital and institutional arrangements are also key for good governance. Inter-sectoral governance mechanisms are needed to manage the protection of urban heritage in ways that are integrated within urban development plans and policies, and with new infrastructure, including services, housing, transport and waste, as well as facilities to support tourism. Coordination across authorities responsible for infrastructure services, transport, tourism, and housing, among others, is key to ensure that plans and processes at the local level work coherently to protect the OUV of the property including its authenticity and integrity.

84. Within individual properties, it is similarly important that management planning processes and documents are aligned and address broader social, economic and environmental dimensions, as well as OUV. In Rabat, *Modern Capital and Historic City: a Shared Heritage* (Morocco), for example, the process of updating the Management Plan involves a range of stakeholders that could present the opportunity to integrate sustainable strategies, and to consider the property's wider setting (being the contemporary city) using the approach of the 2011 Recommendation.
85. The state of conservation reports highlight that as Conservation and Management Plans and documents are prepared, there are considerable benefits arising from technical review by the Advisory Bodies to allow for dialogue and accommodation of external expert advice. The Stone Town of Zanzibar (United Republic of Tanzania) and Samarkand: *Crossroad of Cultures* (Uzbekistan) have both recently benefitted from this process. In the case of Samarkand, the Committee has requested that the new Management Plan should present Urban Design Guidelines for the protection of neighbourhoods, the introduction of new infrastructure and modifications to existing residential buildings as well as a public realm design code.
86. World Heritage cities and their communities should be encouraged to adopt 'inclusive' processes under SDG 11, recognising the crucial role of stakeholder engagement, and the essential contribution of local communities, through all stages of urban planning and management. Such processes need to extend beyond information sharing to genuine interactive consultation and empowerment. Within the *mahalla* areas of Samarkand: *Crossroad of Cultures* (Uzbekistan), for example, mechanisms are needed to engage with local people, and to establish their legitimate needs for services such as reticulated sewerage, as part of an integrated planning process that respects the integrity of these historic areas, while addressing contemporary community needs.
87. Cumulative impacts from poorly planned rapid urban development, responding in particular to tourism growth, remain a significant threat for World Heritage properties.
88. World Heritage buffer zones are particularly vulnerable to increasing urban pressures due to weaker regulations. The Historic Centre of Prague (Czechia), for example, has been subject to longstanding potential and ascertained threats arising from extensive large-scale urban development in the buffer zone of the property and its wider setting, as well as the lack of adequate regulations for high-rise developments that have continued to affect the property's OUV.
89. Inconsistency between regulatory mechanisms that seek to protect heritage, and zoning controls or development standards which actively permit new development of an inappropriate form or scale, or in inappropriate locations, also threaten some World Heritage properties. The outcomes of the different World Heritage City Labs organized by the World Heritage Centre with the participation of the Advisory Bodies also provide strategies for addressing the regulatory mechanisms necessary at different scales from the larger geographical setting to minor architectural details that may be integral to urban heritage attributes which support OUV (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/cities>). Coherence and consistency between different regulatory mechanisms is also crucial to enable clear interpretation and protection of urban heritage. For example, the development of large-

scale high-rise complexes in the buffer zone and setting of a component of the Royal Tombs of the Joseon Dynasty (Republic of Korea) has taken place, having received approval due to differences in the interpretation of the guidelines and requirements for development in the buffer zone of the property. The State Party, acknowledging the potential damage to the OUV of the property, is seeking ways to reduce or mitigate the impacts of completed, ongoing and planned developments in the setting of various component sites of the property.

90. Urban precincts are not immune to the consequences of both natural and human caused hazards and are increasingly vulnerable to effects resulting from climate change and social unrest. An activity of the UNESCO World Heritage Cities Programme on the occasion of the World Cities Day in October 2021 in the framework of the UNESCO Cities Platform, brought together more than 100 site managers, city authorities, and national focal points to exchange on the challenges and strategies in World Heritage cities across the world.
91. The state of conservation reports highlight a number of cases, such as the Fort and Shalamar Gardens in Lahore (Pakistan) and the Historic Centre of Shakhrisabz (Uzbekistan) where prior referral of adequate documentation and consultation with the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies may well have averted significant adverse impacts on OUV. It is also highly desirable that impact assessment processes identify and assess potential effects on attributes which support OUV, within the scope of broader Environmental and Social Impact Assessments. Well informed decision making that has proper regard to OUV would be advised to follow the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context (available at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidance-toolkit-impact-assessments/>), see paragraph 99 below for further details.
92. More broadly, States Parties should be encouraged to follow and use the processes of the World Heritage Convention and in particular the referral and advisory processes available under Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines to support design development and good decision making. The case of the Historic Areas of Istanbul (Türkiye) highlights the need to develop comprehensive strategies covering different types of projects and to conduct OUV-based Heritage and/or Environmental Impact Assessments as a pre-requisite for development projects and activities to be implemented within or around a World Heritage property.
93. States Parties should be encouraged to be proactive and to take a long-term strategic view about development strategies and projects and, where appropriate to prepare and submit strategic short- and long-term strategies covering all types of projects that may impact upon the OUV of the property.

E. Infrastructure development

94. Infrastructure development in and around World Heritage properties continues to exert increasing pressure on their OUV. Development pressures arise within properties, their buffer zones and in the wider setting from, for example:
 - Extractive industries (oil, gas, and mining), e.g., Mount Nimba Strict Nature Reserve (Côte d'Ivoire/Guinea), Laponian Area (Sweden), Canaima National Park (Venezuela),
 - Dam and hydropower developments, (e.g., Dong Phrayayen-Khao Yai Forest Complex (Thailand); Selous Game Reserve (United Republic of Tanzania); Town of Luang Prabang (Lao People's Democratic Republic); Lake Baikal (Russian Federation); Vat Phou (Lao People's Democratic Republic)),

- Roads (e.g., Tropical Rainforest Heritage of Sumatra (Indonesia); Memphis and its Necropolis – the Pyramid Fields from Giza to Dahshur (Egypt); Stonehenge Avebury and Associated Sites (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)),
 - Boundary walls e.g., El Pinacate and Gran Desierto de Altar Biosphere Reserve (Mexico); Białowieża Forest (Belarus/Poland)),
 - Transport infrastructure, (Fort and Shalamar Gardens in Lahore (Pakistan); Town of Luang Prabang (Lao People's Democratic Republic); Dutch Water Defence Lines (Netherlands)) and “Train Maya,” concerning a number of properties in Mexico
 - Expansion of tourism infrastructure.(e.g., Mosi-oa-Tunya/Victoria Falls (Zambia/Zimbabwe); Borobudur Temple Compounds (Indonesia); Lumbini, the Birthplace of the Lord Buddha (Nepal), Saint Catherine Area (Egypt)).
95. The state of conservation reports examined by the Committee at its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021) for cultural properties illustrated how development proposals present a major threat to attributes which support OUV. Assessments of threats undertaken in the IUCN World Heritage Outlook 2020 similarly show that anthropogenic driven development and activities collectively represent the greatest threat to natural World Heritage properties.
96. Threats from development pressures arise when inappropriate development projects are approved without an adequate assessment of the potential impacts of the proposed project on the OUV of the property in line with the provisions of the Operational Guidelines and the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context. In some cases, it is necessary for the impact assessment to be preceded by studies and assessments that identify the attributes of the property which support and convey its OUV, so that potential impacts may be properly understood; or where infrastructure developments may be approved in spite of impacts being identified, or on a presumption that impacts can be mitigated no matter how significant. It is particularly the case that infrastructure projects located outside, but in the wider setting of, a property may not be referred to the World Heritage Centre in conformity with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, for review by the Advisory Bodies, even where it is apparent that the proposal could affect the OUV of the property. Pressures on properties also result from the cumulative impact of multiple developments undertaken in the absence of broader strategic planning, and due consideration of progressive impacts, through processes such as Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA).
97. Decisions regarding proposed infrastructure developments within, or in the wider setting of properties should take into account social and economic impacts on rights-holders and stakeholders, and ensure their full and effective participation in decision-making. Impact assessments must reflect the *Policy Document for the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention*, 2015.
98. Launched in 2022, the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context, was developed jointly by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, ICCROM, ICOMOS, IUCN, in collaboration with the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) through the ICCROM-IUCN World Heritage Leadership Programme, supported by Norway. The new manual provides a clear impact assessment framework for stakeholders involved in impact assessment processes related to World Heritage, such as States Parties, site managers, policy makers, project proponents, civil society, or indigenous peoples and local communities. States Parties are encouraged to implement the new Guidance and Toolkit in planning and decision-making processes to ensure the appropriate assessment of potential impacts of planned infrastructure

developments on the OUV before irreversible decisions are made, and to guide best-practice decision-making that ensures the highest level of protection for World Heritage and OUV. It also integrates and replaces separate previous guidance of ICOMOS and IUCN.

99. A specialised Guidance for Wind Energy Projects in a World Heritage Context (available at <https://whc.unesco.org/en/wind-energy/>) has also been recently launched by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, developed with the funding of the Netherlands Funds-in-Trust in cooperation with the three Advisory Bodies and inputs from the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention from Western and Northern Europe. The online guidance aims to assist stakeholders engaged in policy development, planning and implementation of wind energy projects on the one hand, and key actors involved in the protection of World Heritage properties on the other. The tool includes guidance for assessing the impacts of wind energy projects on the OUV of World Heritage properties and highlights potential proactive actions by the World Heritage stakeholders.
100. In view of the growing demand for impact assessments and capacity development in relation to World Heritage properties, the World Heritage Centre and IUCN are discussing with the Netherlands Commission for Environmental Assessment (NCEA) to establish a trilateral MOU which would facilitate cooperation and support States Parties in processes to conduct quality SEAs and Environmental and Social Impact Assessments (ESIAs) to strengthen protection of the OUV of World Heritage properties. NCEA is a Dutch independent advisory body of experts with a legal advisory role on ESIAs and SEAs in the Netherlands, but it also supports selected low-income countries with the introduction and strengthening of their impact assessment systems, providing also independent advice on specific impact assessment processes.

F. Corporate Sector and the World Heritage ‘no-go’ commitment

101. Through enhanced Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes, the corporate sector can significantly advance sustainable development and protection of World Heritage properties, both by minimising their environmental, social and governance (ESG) risks and by maximizing positive impacts on people, heritage and the planet. It is against this background that UNESCO and IUCN have closely worked with the corporate sector for more than two decades. A summary report on World Heritage and corporate sustainability was provided to the extended 44th session of the Committee (see Document WHC/21/44.COM/7).
102. Companies have demonstrated their support to World Heritage notably by refraining from undertaking or funding activities within properties, their buffer zones or wider setting, which could damage sites and their OUV. These policies are generally referred to as the World Heritage ‘no-go’ commitment due to the 2003 pioneering statement by the International Council on Mining and Metals (ICMM) to no longer pursue mining or oil projects in World Heritage properties. However, they are broad in scope depending on the sector they involve, and often apply a do-no-harm approach to World Heritage.
103. At the IUCN World Conservation Congress in September 2021, following close dialogue with the World Heritage Centre and IUCN amongst other stakeholders, the International Hydropower Association (IHA) – which collectively manages around a third of worldwide installed hydropower capacity – announced a ‘no-go’ commitment on World Heritage. The IHA commitment stipulates that no new hydropower projects should be developed in World Heritage properties and proposes a ‘Duty of care commitment’ to implement high standards of performance and transparency when affecting protected areas as well as candidate protected areas and corridors between protected areas. This commitment also applies to hydropower projects located outside World Heritage properties, but which could potentially negatively impact their values. This welcome commitment aligns with the established position of the Committee that the construction of dams with large

reservoirs within the boundaries of properties is incompatible with their World Heritage status (Decision **40 COM 7**).

104. In December 2022, the World Heritage Centre, with the financial support of the Government of Flanders (Belgium), and in consultation with the Advisory Bodies, launched the “*UNESCO Guidance for the World Heritage ‘No-Go’ Commitment: Global standards for corporate sustainability*” to assist companies to develop or update their policies and strategies to safeguard World Heritage. The guidance complements the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessments in a World Heritage Context and is available on the UNESCO World Heritage Centre website, which also includes a database of corporate sector policies on World Heritage (<https://whc.unesco.org/en/no-go-commitment>). To date, more than 50 companies and industry associations across the extractives, finance, insurance and hydropower sectors, among others, have adopted World Heritage-related policies. While corporate sustainability has been pursued very visibly as part of the global movement on ‘Nature positive’, where leaders from governments, businesses and civil society commit to halting and reversing nature loss, the UNESCO guidance encourages companies to apply their commitments across natural, mixed and cultural properties.

G. World Heritage and Human Rights-based Issues

105. In recent years, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies have been informed of a number of allegations regarding human rights violations and abuses against indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs) in and around World Heritage properties. Alleged cases reported include the alleged planned forced resettlement of the Maasai people living within the Ngorongoro Conservation Area in the United Republic of Tanzania; the alleged atrocities against the Batwa people in the Kahuzi-Biega National Park in the Democratic Republic of Congo; the alleged relocation of the Imraguen fishing community from Banc d’Arguin in Mauritania; and the alleged human rights violations in iSimangaliso Wetland Park in South Africa and those affecting indigenous peoples in the Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex in Thailand. The World Heritage Centre has received Third Party information that proposed and ongoing large-scale developments in Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada have alleged negative impacts on the indigenous peoples and the local communities and their way of living (Human Rights issues related to World Heritage properties are discussed also in Document WHC/23/45.COM/5D). In some cases, complex issues involve the removal and relocation of illegal occupants, such as in Angkor (Cambodia), where the State Party has reportedly implemented previous recommendations of the World Heritage Committee to strengthen the zoning control in the inscribed areas by relocating illegal occupants (See also Document WHC/23/45.COM/5D on this topic).
106. The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies emphasise the fundamental importance of ensuring a rights-based approach to the protection and management of World Heritage properties. Any alleged human rights violations should be of serious concern to the Committee and be thoroughly investigated as a matter of urgency by the States Parties of the properties to which they relate. Based on findings, appropriate actions should be taken in accordance with recommendations stemming from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), to address the respective situations, even where the evidence is contested. It is recommended that, in keeping with the norms of the Convention and the provisions of the Operational Guidelines, an equitably governed consultative process should aim to resolve grievances and establish a relationship of trust, based on effective participation of all rightsholders and stakeholders. One of the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples addressed to UNESCO also recommended the establishment of an independent grievance mechanism for violations at World Heritage sites. The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on ‘Protected areas

and indigenous peoples' rights: the obligations of States and international organizations³, was examined by the UN General Assembly in October 2022.

107. Issues have also arisen for properties for which intangible attributes support OUV. Examples include the need for appropriate arrangements for traditional pilgrims to the Jokhang Temple Plaza, part of the Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace, Lhasa (China), the need for effective integration of intangible and ecological aspects within urban policies to maintain the town as a living entity at the Town of Luang Prabang (Lao People's Democratic Republic), or the importance of cultural heritage to the community and sense of identity within properties affected by armed conflict within the Arab States Region. These circumstances also serve to highlight the importance of the provisions in Article 5 (a) of the World Heritage Convention, which require States Parties to "adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes".
108. The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples raised issues regarding the principle of free, prior and informed consent (FPIC) in World Heritage procedures and in certain World Heritage properties, including for example the Kaeng Krachan Forest Complex (Thailand), the Ngorongoro Conservation Area (United Republic of Tanzania) and the Laponian Area (Sweden). It is important to recall that the Operational Guidelines encourage States Parties to adopt a human-rights based approach and ensure a gender-balanced participation of a wide variety of stakeholders and rights-holders, including indigenous peoples, in the identification, nomination, management and protection processes of World Heritage properties (Paragraph 12). States Parties are encouraged to obtain the FPIC of indigenous peoples before including sites affecting their lands, territories or resources on their Tentative List (Paragraph 64) and to demonstrate that such consent was obtained in nominations to the World Heritage List (Paragraph 123). Reference to the above-mentioned report of the UN Special Rapporteur is also included in Document WHC/23/45 COM/5D dedicated to World Heritage Convention and Sustainable Development.
109. The Operational Guidelines further recognize that an effective management system should include 'a thorough shared understanding of the property, its universal, national and local values and its socio-ecological context by all stakeholders, including local communities and indigenous peoples' (Paragraph 111). Although the responsibility for the implementation of effective management activities for a World Heritage property lies with the State Party, they should be carried out in close collaboration with 'local communities and indigenous peoples, rights-holders and stakeholders in property management, by developing, when appropriate, equitable governance arrangements, collaborative management systems and redress mechanisms' (Paragraph 117).
110. States Parties must therefore ensure that programmes and activities related to the World Heritage Convention follow a rights-based approach that includes full involvement of all rightsholders and stakeholders, in particular IPLCs, in line with the 2015 Policy on World Heritage and Sustainable Development, with the UNESCO Policy on Engaging with Indigenous Peoples as well as with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and international human rights standards.

H. Earth observation and spatial data for World Heritage conservation

111. In its Decision **44 COM 7.2**, the World Heritage Committee advocated for further investment in institutional and individual capacity to make full use of Earth Observation

³ Available at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a77238-protected-areas-and-indigenous-peoples-rights-obligations-states>.

satellite technologies, spatial data and analysis tools remote sensing technologies for the early detection of activities potentially harmful to the OUV of World Heritage properties, and requested States Parties, the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies, UNESCO Category 2 Centres and other relevant institutions to strengthen collaborative partnerships.

112. Based on spatial and satellite-based information, the World Heritage Centre in collaboration with key scientific partners undertook studies on the state of World Heritage forests (report published in October 2021), glaciers (published in November 2022), and biodiversity (published in May 2023). The World Heritage Centre, with the financial support of the Government of Flanders (Belgium), has developed the [World Heritage Online Map Platform](#), which aims to provide States Parties with a comprehensive, complete, accurate and geo-referenced dataset of their World Heritage properties, in accordance with the boundaries adopted by the Committee. The pilot phase of the platform has been first developed with data submitted on a voluntary basis by States Parties in Europe and North America, in parallel with the Periodic Reporting and Retrospective Inventory exercises underway in the region. Beyond this initial project, the functionality of this tool could be further developed and the platform expanded to include World Heritage properties in other regions.
113. The World Heritage Centre in consultation with experts as well as the Advisory Bodies has also developed the *Urban Heritage Atlas* as a geo-spatial tool for cultural mapping of the attributes of World Heritage cities and urban heritage on a GIS database across different scales. Linked to also to visual analysis and narrative stories including traditional building techniques and associated intangible dimensions, the Urban Heritage tool, supports capacity building of site managers and local authorities, the implementation of the 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, as well as the development of management plans and governance mechanisms. The Urban Heritage Climate Observatory (UHCO), a collaboration between the World Heritage Centre and the Group on Earth Observation (GEO) Secretariat and the Greek GEO Office continues with an ongoing study using Earth Observation tools and data to analyse the impact of climate change on World Heritage cities in the Mediterranean region. Explorations are also ongoing for assessing available data and capacities for pilots to carry out more detailed analysis on the state of conservation of the properties using Earth Observation tools and data.
114. Discussions on the application of space technologies for world heritage monitoring and conservation with the advisory bodies and the international centre on space technologies for natural and cultural heritage (hist), a UNESCO category-2 centre in China continued, with potential collaboration being explored around the provision of high-resolution satellite imagery for geospatial information updates in particular for natural world heritage properties.

IV. DRAFT DECISIONS

Draft Decision: 45 COM 7.1

The World Heritage Committee,

Climate Action for World Heritage

1. *Having examined Document WHC/23/45.COM/7,*
2. *Recalling Decisions **40 COM 7** and **44 COM 7C**, adopted at its 40th session (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016) and at its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021),*

3. Notes that the Panel of experts in relation to Decision **44 COM 7C** concerning climate change and World Heritage met by end of March 2022 and made recommendations on the amendments proposed by the Members of the World Heritage Committee and provided a report to the Open-ended Working Group of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention on Climate Change;
4. Also notes that the Open-ended Working Group of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention on Climate Change has met seven times to discuss the proposed amendments and the recommendations of the Panel of experts;
5. Recognizes Climate Action for World Heritage as an important thematic area of work, thanks the Governments of Australia, Azerbaijan and the Netherlands for their generous financial support and invites States Parties to contribute towards this thematic area to enable the Secretariat to support activities related to the development of the updated Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage and its dissemination;
6. Recalls again Decision **41 COM 7** in which the Committee ‘reiterate[d] the importance of States Parties undertaking the most ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and by pursuing efforts to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change”’, again strongly urges all States Parties to undertake actions to address Climate Change under the Paris Agreement consistent with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances, that are fully consistent with their obligations within the World Heritage Convention to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of all World Heritage properties;

Improving the perception of the List of World Heritage in Danger

7. Recalling Decision **40 COM 7**, adopted at its 40th session (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016),
8. Reaffirming the need to promote a better understanding of the implications and benefits of properties being inscribed on the List of World Heritage in Danger,
9. Takes note with appreciation of the thorough study on the perceptions of the List of World Heritage in Danger, together with its recommendations that could form the basis of a communication strategy and thanks the State Party of Norway for its financial support;
10. Expresses its gratitude to all the stakeholders of the 1972 World Heritage Convention who have actively contributed to this study;
11. Takes note with satisfaction of the recommendations formulated in the study on possible approaches to reverse negative perceptions and to raise the profile of the List of World Heritage in Danger as a positive tool, enhancing understanding and highlighting its importance for the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage properties and requests all stakeholders of the Convention to take them on-board and implement them at their level as soon as possible;

Draft Decision: 45 COM 7.2

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC/23/45.COM/7,
2. Recalling Decisions **40 COM 7**, **41 COM 7**, **42 COM 7**, **43 COM 7.2**, and **44 COM 7.2**, adopted at its 40th (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016), 41st (Krakow, 2017), 42nd (Manama,

2018), 43rd (Baku, 2019) and extended 44th (Fuzhou/online, 2021) sessions respectively,

3. Also recalling that all proposed major interventions in and around World Heritage properties should be subject to rigorous impact assessments, as outlined in Paragraph 118bis of the Operational Guidelines, in line with the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context, and that both the proposals and the impact assessment-related documentation be submitted, in accordance with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines, to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies, before any interventions for new construction, demolition, modification, recovery or reconstruction commences or decisions made that cannot be reversed;

Emergency situations resulting from conflicts

4. Expresses utmost concern that conflicts (including armed conflict and civil unrest) continue to represent a major threat to World Heritage properties and remain one of the major reasons for the inscription of properties on the List of World Heritage in Danger;
5. Regrets the loss of human life and the degradation of humanitarian conditions resulting from the prevailing conflict situations in several countries, including threats to the personnel and local communities, as well as the continuing threats facing cultural and natural heritage in regions of armed conflict where there are significant concerns regarding security in and around World Heritage properties;
6. Welcomes protection and conservation efforts being undertaken by the concerned States Parties at World Heritage properties and that the States Parties are progressively proceeding with the development of corrective measures and the definition of the Desired state of conservation for the removal of the properties from the List of World Heritage in Danger (DSOCR) for some cultural properties following due process;
7. Urges again all parties associated with conflicts to ensure the protection of cultural and natural heritage, including to avoid their use for military purposes and also urges States Parties to fulfil their obligations under international law, including the 1954 Convention and its two Protocols, by taking all possible measures to protect such heritage, including of World Heritage properties and sites included in Tentative Lists;
8. Reiterates its utmost concern about the continuing threats of wildlife poaching and illegal trafficking of wildlife and timber products linked to impacts of armed conflict and organized crime, which is eroding the biodiversity and Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage properties around the world, and further urges States Parties to take the necessary measures to curb this problem, including through the implementation of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES);
9. Also reiterates its utmost concern at the increase in illicit trafficking of cultural objects, resulting from armed conflicts, and appeals to all States Parties to cooperate in the fight against these threats, and for cultural heritage protection in general, including through the ratification of the 1970 Convention and the 1954 Convention and its two Protocols, as well as the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2199 (2015), 2253 (2015) and 2347 (2017), and the implementation of the UNESCO Recommendations on Museums; and Collections (2015);
10. Welcomes UNESCO and the Advisory Bodies' continued actions in responding to emergencies and conflicts threatening cultural and natural heritage including through the Revive the Spirit of Mosul and the Li Beirut initiatives, the Heritage Emergency Fund (HEF) and the Rapid Response Facility (RRF) and the UNESCO Action Plan for Culture in Ukraine;

11. *Reiterates its call upon the international community to further support the safeguarding of the cultural and natural heritage of countries affected by conflict, through earmarked funds or through contributions to the UNESCO HEF and RRF;*

Recovery and Reconstruction

12. *Recalls that reconstruction is justifiable only in exceptional circumstances, and should be based on thorough documentation, guided by conservation plans and policies that support the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV), and as outlined in Paragraph 86 of the Operational Guidelines;*
13. *Takes note of the various programmes initiated and implemented by the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies and other international partners to respond to the destruction of heritage through documentation, emergency response, recovery and reconstruction;*
14. *Welcomes the continued efforts by States Parties in responding to post-conflict and post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, including the various reconstruction projects nearing completion, as well as their positive social and community interlinkages and thanks France, Germany, Japan, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Spain, the Sultanate of Oman, the United Arab Emirates, the European Union, the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH), the Heritage Emergency Fund and the Arab Regional Centre for World Heritage (ARC-WH) for their generous support, including for the reconstruction of the House of Wonder, an emblematic building in East Africa, in the Stone Town of Zanzibar, United Republic of Tanzania;*
15. *Encourages all State Parties to prepare comprehensive risk preparedness strategies and emergency response plans for World Heritage properties that are exposed to risk from natural disasters;*
16. *Requests States Parties to ensure the integrity of the OUV of World Heritage properties and that all recovery and reconstruction projects be guided by thorough and comprehensive recovery proposals, including plans and drawings, integrated and aligned with the needs of local communities and subject to rigorous impact assessments as noted in Paragraph 3 above;*

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

17. *Welcomes the adoption of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) during the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP-15) to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in December 2022 to set the global pathway to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;*
18. *Requests the States Parties to fully harness the World Heritage Convention in supporting the goals and targets of the GBF, including through effective collaboration among convention focal points, and by integrating World Heritage-related objectives within their National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs);*
19. *Also requests the World Heritage Centre, in collaboration with the Advisory Bodies, to identify and develop coordinated actions on World Heritage and the GBF, including specific guidance on how the World Heritage Convention might contribute to the aims of the Joint Programme of Work on the Links between Biological and Cultural Diversity, subject to the availability of resources, and to integrate reporting on progress regarding contributions of World Heritage to the GBF under the Committee's item on Sustainable Development and invites States Parties to contribute financially for this purpose;*

Urban pressure

20. *Notes that pressures on historic urban areas arising from inappropriate urban development interventions and inadequate development controls, rapid and*

inadequately planned development, including large development projects, additions that are incompatible in their volume, tourism and transportation infrastructure, as well as the accumulated impact of incremental changes, have continued within numerous World Heritage properties and in their buffer zones and settings, and considers that these present significant potential and ascertained major threats to the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of properties, including their integrity and authenticity, and increase their vulnerability to disasters, such as those resulting from climate change;

21. *Also noting that the findings of the UNESCO Third Member State Consultation on the Implementation of the 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (2011 Recommendation) request States Parties to implement the 2011 Recommendation in urban World Heritage properties and, with technical assistance from the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies, to integrate it as a tool in the monitoring processes of the state of conservation and the preparation of management plans for World Heritage properties in cities and settlements including with the support of the World Heritage Urban Heritage Atlas tool;*
22. *Recalls the essential contribution of local communities, and the importance of their participation in decision-making processes, as well as the need to support sustainable, compatible, and inclusive livelihoods for local communities and further requests States Parties to embed stakeholder engagement in management systems and processes, in line with Paragraph 12 of the Operational Guidelines, with the 2011 Recommendation and the Policy on the Integration of a Sustainable Development Perspective into the Processes of the World Heritage Convention (2015);*
23. *Invites all States Parties to establish governance mechanisms for urban heritage that support coordination and coherence across different sectors such as infrastructure, tourism, transport, and urban development to integrate heritage management into the plans and processes of the settlement and the region;*
24. *Stresses the importance of carrying out impact assessments to evaluate and thereby avoid or manage potential threats to the OUV of properties, including their authenticity and integrity, arising from new urban development projects in line with paragraph 3 above;*
25. *Also emphasizes the need to enhance resilience of World Heritage properties in urban areas vulnerable to climate change-related impacts, in line with the 2011 Recommendation and the outcomes of the activities of the UNESCO World Heritage Cities Programme;*

Infrastructure development

26. *Notes with concern the growing pressure of infrastructure development, such as extractive mining activities, dams, hydropowers, transportation infrastructure, and the expansion of tourism infrastructure, on the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of World Heritage properties;*
27. *Welcomes the commitment announced by the International Hydropower Association (IHA) that no new hydropower projects should be developed in World Heritage properties, and a duty of care pledge to implement high standards of performance and transparency for any hydropower projects outside of but affecting protected areas such as World Heritage properties;*
28. *Strongly urges all States Parties, development proponents and financiers to incorporate the new Guidance and Toolkit for Impact Assessment in a World Heritage Context into planning and decision-making processes to contribute to safeguarding the OUV of World Heritage properties, in line with Paragraph 3 above;*
29. *Requests all States Parties to:*

- a) *Inform the World Heritage Centre of any planned developments located within a World Heritage property, its buffer zone or in its wider setting that may impact on its OUV, prior to making any decision that would be difficult to reverse, in conformity with Paragraph 172 of the Operational Guidelines,*
- b) *Ensure that the potential impacts of developments on the OUV are appropriately assessed, in line with Paragraph 3 above,*
- c) *Ensure that no proposed developments proceed that would negatively impact on the OUV,*
- d) *Ensure that no deliberate measures are taken, which might damage directly or indirectly the inscribed properties situated on the territory of other States Parties to the Convention, in conformity with Article 6 of the World Heritage Convention;*

Corporate Sector and the World Heritage ‘no-go’ commitment

- 30. *Welcomes the launch of the “UNESCO Guidance for the World Heritage ‘No-Go’ Commitment: Global standards for corporate sustainability” as a means to assist the corporate sector to develop or update their policies and strategies to safeguard World Heritage, and thanks the Government of Flanders (Belgium) for its financial support;*
- 31. *Requests the World Heritage Centre, in collaboration with the Advisory Bodies, to continue its collaboration with the corporate sector in view of supporting the adoption and implementation of World Heritage safeguard policies, and invites companies and relevant organisations to develop and update their corporate sustainability policies in line with the UNESCO guidance, and lodge them with UNESCO;*

Rights-based Issues

- 32. *Recalling Article 5 of the Convention that each State Party shall adopt for each country a general policy, which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community, and the integration of the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes are means of ensuring effective protection, conservation and presentation of cultural and natural heritage,*
- 33. *Also recalling the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples,*
- 34. *Further recalling the various provisions of the Operational Guidelines that encourage States Parties to adopt a human rights-based approach to the nomination and subsequent effective management of inscribed World Heritage properties,*
- 35. *Calls upon all States Parties to ensure that human rights, including cultural rights, are protected as an integral part of the management of World Heritage properties by establishing equitable and participatory governance arrangements;*
- 36. *Strongly condemns all forms of human rights violations and abuses towards indigenous peoples and local communities (IPLCs), including any forced eviction;*
- 37. *Notes with utmost concern the reported cases of alleged human rights abuses towards IPLCs in and around World Heritage properties and therefore, strongly urges the States Parties concerned to urgently investigate the allegations and take appropriate actions to address their findings, following an equitably governed consultative process with the participation and decision making of all rightsholders and stakeholders;*
- 38. *Reminds States Parties of their obligations to ensure that the management of World Heritage properties follows a rights-based approach that includes full involvement of all rightsholders and stakeholders, in particular IPLCs, in line with the 2015 Policy on World Heritage and Sustainable Development, the UNESCO Policy on Engaging with*

Indigenous Peoples and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and international human rights standards;

Earth observation and spatial data for World heritage conservation

39. *Welcomes the development of the World Heritage Online Mapping Platform to provide a comprehensive, complete, accurate and geo-referenced dataset for the World Heritage properties that, in the pilot phase of the project, are in the Europe and North America region, and thanks the Government of Flanders (Belgium) for the support provided to the pilot phase of the project;*
40. *Also welcomes the Urban Heritage Atlas platform and tool for geo-referenced cultural mapping of the attributes of urban heritage and invites States Parties to use the tool for better managing their World Heritage properties and takes note with satisfaction of the continued activities of the Urban Heritage Climate Observatory applying earth observation tools for World Heritage cities;*
41. *Invites States Parties to contribute to the above-mentioned platforms and tools with already available GIS data, complementary narrative and visual analysis, expertise, networks, and financial resources;*
42. *Reiterates its request to States Parties, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies, to strengthen collaborative partnerships with UNESCO Category 2 Centres and other relevant institutions with a view to furthering the necessary institutional and individual capacity needed to make full use of spatial data, Earth observation satellite technologies and analysis tools for the monitoring of the state of conservation of World Heritage properties.*