

Remarks of the Honourable Russell E Train

World Heritage Convention

30th Anniversary

Venice, Italy

Saturday, 16 November 2002

The World Heritage – A vision for the Future

Dr Bandarin and distinguished guests, it is a great honour for me to participate with you in this international conference celebrating the 30th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention. WWF has, of course, been closely involved in the conservation of many World Heritage sites for many years and will continue to do so.

I join all of you, I am sure, in expressing gratitude to UNESCO, the Italian government, and the Cini Foundation for making this meeting possible.

It is especially fitting that we should be meeting here in Venice, which, together with its lagoon, is a World Heritage site – and which epitomizes the essential interrelationship of the natural and man-made environments. On a personal note, it is a special pleasure that we should be meeting here at San Giorgio Maggiore in the midst of the lagoon. An 18th century oil painting of this storied isle hangs in my living room in Washington.

Thirty-five years ago, in 1967, when I was the new president of the Convention Foundation, since merged with WWF, I participated in an International Congress on Nature and Man in Amsterdam, and I gave an address there under the title: *A World Heritage Trust*. As part of that speech I said:

“I believe it is to be particularly appropriate at this Congress on “Nature and Man” to urge the launching of a international cooperative effort that brings together in a unified programme a common concern for both man’s natural heritage and his cultural heritage. In so doing, we will be recognized that our civilization, past and present, is inextricably linked to our physical environment. Indeed, the works of man are necessarily founded upon and moulded by the natural environment. Can we conceive of a Venice in isolation from the sea?”

Let me go back for a moment and outline the historical background of the World Heritage concept.

In 1965, I participated in a White House Conference on International Cooperation in Washington and was a member of its Committee on Natural Resources. The idea for a World Heritage Trust, combining both natural and cultural values, emerged in discussions between Dr Joseph Fisher, Chairman of the Committee, and myself. Our Committee Report declared that certain scenic, historic, and natural resources are part of man’s heritage, and that their survival is a matter of major concern to all.

Our recommendation was:

That there be established a Trust for the World Heritage that would be responsible to the world community for the stimulation of international cooperative efforts to

identify, establish, develop, and manage the world's superb natural and scenic areas and historic sites for the present and future benefit of the entire world citizenry.

That recommendation was submitted to President Lyndon Johnson but no action was taken. A year later, in 1966, IUCN at its biannual world congress, held that year at Lausanne, endorsed the principle of a world heritage trust in a resolution drafted by Joseph Fisher, Harold Coolidge, and myself. From that date, IUCN and ICOMOS separately developed their own drafts of such a trust convention. Then, in 1967, I gave the speech in Amsterdam from which I have already quoted. That speech assumed one World Heritage programme to embrace both natural and cultural sites.

In 1970, the Council on Environmental Quality was established in the Nixon White House, and I was named its first Chairman. Among the Council's responsibilities was the preparation of an annual environmental report by the President to the Congress. President Nixon was determined that he have a strong environmental record. And he was determined that his environmental initiatives have a major dimension of international cooperation.

In that latter regard, Nixon's 1971 environmental message, written in my office, declared in general: "It is my intention that we will develop a firm and effective fabric of cooperation among the nations of the world on these environmental issues".

His message then went on to say:

As the United States approaches the centennial celebration in 1972 of the establishment of Yellowstone National Park, it would be appropriate to mark this historic event by a new international initiative Yellowstone is the first national park to have been created in the modern world, and the national park concept has represented a major contribution to world culture. Similar systems have now been established throughout the world.....

It would be fitting by 1972 for the nations of the world to agree to the principle that there are certain areas of such unique worldwide value that they should be treated as part of the heritage of all mankind and accorded special recognition as a part of a World Heritage Trust.... I believe that such an initiative can add a new dimension to international cooperation.

I am directing the Secretary of the Interior, in coordination with the Council of Environment Quality, and under the foreign policy guidance of the Secretary of State, to develop initiatives for presentation in appropriate international forum to further the objective of a World Heritage Trust.

In preparation for the 1972 UN Conference on the Human Environment to be held at Stockholm, the US supported the concept of a single World Heritage programme embracing both natural and cultural areas, supported the role of UNESCO in providing a home for the World Heritage Center, and also supported the continuing substantive advisory roles of IUCN and ICOMOS. In addition, the US insisted on making financial contributions by member states voluntary. Unfortunately, this rule has led the US to contribute to the programme relatively small amounts—amounts which are in my view inconsistent with the leadership role of the US in bringing the world heritage concept into reality in the first place.

In June of 1972, at the Stockholm Conference to which I headed the US delegation, I put forward the World Heritage in my address to the conference. The delegates later voted overwhelmingly to endorse the World Heritage concept and the adoption of a convention to that effect, at the General Conference of UNESCO that fall. And, of course, the convention was duly adopted on the 16th of November that year.

While I have been sometimes described as the “father of the World Heritage” that overstates my role. There were many who played an important part in its creation. I have already mentioned in that regard Joseph Fisher and Harold Coolidge. Assistant Secretary of Interior Nathaniel Reed and the Senior Scientist of the Council on Environmental Quality, Lee Talbot, played important roles in the preparatory work leading up to the 1972 Stockholm Conference. Michel Batisse played an important role for UNESCO. However, while I do not claim paternity, the fact is that I was fortuitously situated to move the Trust concept forward on the international agenda. In any event, whether a parent or not, I am very proud of our offspring on this, its 30th birthday.

So much for history.

I applaud the emphasis that is being given in this programme to building partnerships that can help promote the World Heritage. I applaud the leadership of the United Nations Foundation in encouraging such partnerships in the private sector, and I congratulate the wisdom and foresight of Ted Turner in helping to make this possible.

The whole World Heritage concept is based upon a series of partnerships and interrelationships. The World Heritage Convention itself represents a partnership among 175 nations, a partnership that recognizes the integral interrelationship between humanity and environment as well as between the natural environment and the man-made environment.

I believe that this concept of partnership provides a vitally important insight and a guideline for the future of the World Heritage programme, an insight and a guideline that take on new urgency with every passing day.

From the beginning, I have seen the purpose of the World Heritage as being something more than simply helping to assure protection and quality management for unique natural and cultural sites around the world –as critically important as that goal is. Above and beyond that goal, I see the programme as an opportunity to convey the idea of a common heritage among nations and peoples everywhere! I see it as a compelling idea that can help unite people rather than divide them. I see it as an idea that can help build a sense of community among people throughout the world. I see it as an idea whose time has truly come.

Two months ago, my wife and I had the privilege of visiting Australia. We visited Lamington National Park in Queensland and the Great Barrier Reef. Both areas make major efforts to explain their World Heritage Status, a matter of pride among many Australians. I regret to say that few Americans have any knowledge whatsoever of the World Heritage.

At this particular time in history, as the fabric of civilized human society seems increasingly under attack by forces that deny the very existence of a shared heritage, forces that strike at the very heart of our sense of community, I am convinced that the World Heritage holds out a contrary and positive vision of human society and our human future.

We need to promote that vision by educational programme in our schools and at World Heritage sites worldwide. The citizen of Venice should feel not only pride in the status of Venice as a World Heritage site but should develop a sense of pride and even ownership, albeit spiritual ownership, in Yellowstone, in the Acropolis, in the Serengeti, in Angkor Wat, in the Galapagos and so on around the world.

The vision I leave with you is that the World Heritage should not only assure the protection of the world’s unique natural and cultural sites but should help instil in the world’s peoples a new sense of our kinship with one another as part of a single, global community.