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BUREAU OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

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Information Document: **Summary Report of the UNESCO Intermediary Mission on the World Heritage Sites in Danger in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

This summary report has been prepared by the 2-person team that undertook a mission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring countries from 8 May to 11 June 2000. It will be referred to in relation to discussions on the state of conservation of World Heritage properties in Danger in the Democratic Republic of the Congo described in WHC-2000/CONF.204/4

UNESCO INTERMEDIARY MISSION ON THE WORLD HERITAGE SITES IN DANGER IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Summary report to the consideration of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee (24th session, 26 June – 1 July 2000, Paris)

Introduction

The need and the justification of this mission could be found in the report of the 23rd session of the Committee that was held in Marakkesh (29 November – 4 December 1999). The aim of the mission was to facilitate the establishment of a favourable environment to promote the implementation of international co-operation programmes and projects for the conservation of the World Heritage sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), as well as the work of the staff of the Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature (ICCN) and its partners committed to the conservation of the biological diversity of these sites.

The objectives of the mission were the following:

- Sensitize civil and military authorities in the DRC, as well as in the eastern parts of DRC and in neighbouring countries implicated in the war in the latter region, to their legal obligations under the World Heritage Convention and the necessity to contribute to the conservation of World Heritage sites;
- Inform civil and military authorities of DRC and of neighbouring countries, representatives of the United Nations, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, NGOs, and local community leaders of the objectives and activities of the UNF Project in support of the World Heritage sites in DRC and solicit their support and co-operation for its effective implementation;
- Explore with bilateral and multilateral development agencies and institutions, and appropriate NGOs their interest to contribute to the execution of the UNF Project, particularly for specific activities that generate support of local communities for the protection of sites, purchase of equipment and materials, training of personnel for surveillance and inventories etc;
- Gather information on the initiatives of the United Nations for the restoration of peace and reconciliation, particularly in the eastern parts of DRC, and explore opportunities to link such initiatives to the execution of the UNF Project and to generating diplomatic support for the protection of the World Heritage sites;
- Collect information and establish necessary contacts for the organisation of a high-level diplomatic mission to be undertaken as an integral part of the UNF Project and prepare a plan for the programme of that mission; and
- Collect up-to-date information on the state of conservation of the five World Heritage sites, identify principal threats to the integrity of the sites and recommend measures for minimising their impacts and improve the working conditions of site-staff.

Execution of the Mission

The mission, with the participation of Dr. J.P. d'Huart (WWF - Belgium) and Dr. T.B. Hart (WCS), was fielded from 8 May to 11 June 2000. The mission team visited relevant authorities, agencies and NGOs in the following locations: Kinshasa, Kampala, Kigali, Bukavu, Goma, Beni and Bunia. The mission ended with the participation of the mission team

at a meeting of partners of the UNF Project at Naivasha, Kenya. In each of the cities visited, the meetings and appointments were prepared jointly by ICCN, NGO partners and/or the Office of the local Representative of UNESCO; this enabled the mission team to meet with a list of important persons within the limited time available for the mission.

All the authorities met, both civil as well as military, expressed their concerns to maintain the integrity of the World Heritage sites and affirmed their willingness to respect the provisions of the World Heritage Convention (DRC and Uganda) or ratify the Convention soon (Rwanda). Each of them, committed to support the protection of the sites and the implementation of the UNF Project within the limits of their own mandates and constraints. The different agencies of the United Nations (UNDP, UNHC, WFP, FAO), bilateral and multilateral co-operation agencies (European Union, USA, Belgium and Germany) and the United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNOMC) affirmed their willingness to contribute to the UNF Project at the broadest possible levels as well to support specific requests in each of the regions where the sites are located.

The mission team submitted to each of the persons met, a letter summarising information on the status of sites, UNF Project activities foreseen and specific requests which the concerned authority or person could address. In addition, the mission team had left with a certain number of key persons a memorandum describing a list of precise, urgent and local actions that need to be taken to respect the integrity of sites. Examples of such urgent and local actions requested to be implemented include: need for re-arming site-staff; recognition of the politically neutral status of the World Heritage sites; the need to respect the integrity of the sites; respect for the safety of equipment to be provided by the UNF Project to sites; co-operation of armed forces etc. A copy of these documents could be obtained at the World Heritage Centre of UNESCO.

Several discussions with ICCN staff responsible for the sites and their local partners allowed the collection of important and up-to-date information on the state of conservation of the sites.

In general, all the objectives of the intermediary mission were attained. A full report of the mission will be submitted to the World Heritage Centre before the end of July 2000. This report presents only a selection of the conclusions and recommendations of the mission that directly concern the work of the Bureau and some urgent decisions it could take at its twenty-fourth session.

Synthesis of Mission Conclusions

1. The situation in the World Heritage sites of DRC, though variable from site-to-site, is rather alarming and the decision of the World Heritage Committee to place them in the List of World Heritage in Danger is fully justified. The overall situation in some sites (Kahuzi Biega, Garamba) appears to be improving slowly, while in other sites (Virunga and Okapi), it is, on the contrary, deteriorating. If peace returns quickly (within a maximum period of 12 months), one may hope that the UNF Project could significantly contribute towards reversing such deteriorating trends in those sites. On the contrary, if the conflictual situation persists, the mission team fears that the degradation caused to the biological diversity of the sites, coupled with the anarchical trends in the country and the weakening of ICCN staff, would constitute severe constraints on the Project's ability to attain its objectives.
2. Despite the fact that the threats, and responsibilities for the damage caused, to the sites are attributed by the government authorities (formal and rebel) to a wide range of groups, it appears that the Project could count on the understanding and support of all persons met by the mission team. Each of them, within the limits of their responsibilities and ability to

act, committed to respond positively to specific requests for action which they would have to carry out in order to contribute to the protection of the sites and to execution of the Project.

3. Similarly, possibilities for certain specific types of support were offered by the United Nations Agencies (including the UNOMC) or by bilateral and multilateral development co-operation agencies. They viewed the launch of the UNF/UNESCO Project for the whole of DRC, currently divided, as an innovative pilot initiative and the organisational, administrative and financial aspects of the execution of the project could present a model that eventually contribute to resolving some the problems that the implementation of their own programmes currently have. The interest to search for synergies between the projects of different UN Agencies enables the envisaging of a number of collaborative actions which require specific follow-up.
4. These conclusions imply that those responsible for the UNF Project ensure rapid follow-up on all specific actions requested and offers of support received by our mission in a coordinated manner. They also underline the importance of concerted and urgent approach needed to enable close coordination of this Project which concerns five different sites and a multitude of actors.
5. The number of contacts that the mission had with responsible authorities in regions neighbouring the World Heritage sites demonstrated the weak understanding that such authorities had of the problems of the sites and their present and future consequences and the national and international legal obligations of their government. In this regard the mission witnessed the effects of the low importance assigned by site managers, in the past, for establishing regular formal and informal contacts with such authorities in the neighbouring regions.
6. With the UNF project supporting the network of 5 World Heritage sites about to commence, the mission found the total lack of communication and co-ordination between authorities responsible for ICCN and the sites to be of serious concern. The operations in these sites are actually under the authority of individuals who are part of three different governance regimes (Salonga - : Government of DRC, Kinshasa; Garamba, Okapi and northern sector of Virunga - rebel authorities based in Bunia and Beni; and the southern sector of Virunga and Kahuzi Biega – rebel authorities based in Goma and Bukavu). The mission was of the view that efforts to improve official co-ordination between certain key persons shall benefit the protected areas of DRC and ICCN in general, and the UNF Project in particular. The case of the Virunga National Park is illustrative: its division into two sectors by the boundary separating zones of influence of two different rebel groups which are also occupied by two foreign armed forces, the political reality places the two sectors of the Park under different management and exploitation regimes and prevents communications between ICCN staff from the North and South, as well as with their headquarters in Kinshasa.
7. While noting that the GTZ (PARCID) project's institutional support to the ICCN Directorate appears very efficient in the development of new plans, programmes and procedures emanating out of Kinshasa, the mission called for greater attention to a re-examination of the deployment of personnel in relation to the functions, problems and challenges confronting ICCN
8. Despite the large number of personalities met by the mission and the volume of actions that were undertaken, the mission believes that some of the support at the highest level need to be re-ascertained and strengthened with a view to concretise the willingness for collaboration expressed into actions on the ground. The follow-up of the several requests addressed to the Governments of DRC, Uganda and Rwanda by the mission justifies that

the high-level, diplomatic mission of UNESCO is fielded to three capitals as soon as possible.

Recommendations to the Consideration fo the Bureau

As per its specific terms of reference, our intermediary mission is happy to have the opportunity afforded to it to formulate to the consideration of the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee, a series of recommended decisions which, if they are translated into actions, will constitute invaluable support to the sites and the harmonious launch of the UNF Project.

In this context the Bureau is invited to consider and adopt the following decisions:

1. Following the meetings between the intermediary mission and Mr. Morjane, Special Representative of the UN Secretary General in DRC and the Head of UNOMC, a memorandum, describing the nature of support that the UNF Project could hope to obtain from UNOMC, was submitted to Mr. Morjane. The types of support solicited include, for example, the transport of equipment and individuals. Mr. Morjane has indicated that such support could be provided, but specifically requested that: (a) UNESCO officially confirms the types of support proposed and (b) UNESCO nominates a focal point between the Project and the UNOMC in Kinshasa. Hence it is suggested that the ***Bureau requests the Director of the Centre to review the requests contained in the memorandum submitted by the intermediary mission to the Chief of UNOMC and take decisions to ensure their adequate follow up and assign a focal person for contacts between the UNF project and UNOMC at Kinshasa.***
2. The mission has demonstrated the importance and urgency of close coordination of the UNF Project and its launch. The co-ordinator's attention should be simultaneously focussed on a diversity of activities such as: follow up of contacts established by the mission with agencies and with local authorities who have authority on the 5 sites; management and financial administration of the project; supervision of the initiation of community development, training, surveillance and inventorying activities, internal and external communications etc. It is imperative that this position of the co-ordinator should be established as soon as possible and should be assisted by consultants in certain tasks. Hence, it is suggested that the ***Bureau requests the Centre to take all necessary measures to recruit a co-ordinator as soon as possible, in consultation with the United Nations Foundation and assuring that the budget foreseen for the totality of coordination operations enable the necessary quality of services.***
3. The mission has emphasised the importance of communication and coordination between persons who have direct responsibilities for ICCN operations in the 3 zones of influence within the DRC. An official meeting between the three key persons could prevent any unilateral decision on the management of the sites and its personnel, constitute the base of an informal network of persons and resources assuring the cohesion of ICCN at the national level, and commit those persons to play their respective roles for the success of the UNF Project. Hence, it is suggested that the ***Bureau requests the centre to convene, as soon as possible, a short informal meeting among the three appropriate technical authorities to discuss the best coordination and communication mechanisms to adopt in view of optimising the work of ICCN through the different parts of the territory of DRC. Such a meeting could be organised in Nairobi, financed under the budget of the UNF Project, and facilitated by a neutral person acceptable to the three parties.***

4. The intermediary mission identified a limited number of key contacts which should be reinforced by the next high-level, diplomatic mission of UNESCO. This reinforcement could have the effect of hastening the implementation of support and partnerships offered and formalise, at the highest level, the requests made by the mission. It is therefore recommended that the ***Bureau invites the Director Generals of UNESCO and UNEP to make themselves available for a visit to the capitals of RDC, Uganda and Rwanda. It is suggested that their programmes be limited to meetings with:***
- ***Heads of States and the members of their Governments concerned with the implementation (or ratification) of the World Heritage Convention and the protection of the World Heritage sites in DRC; particular emphasis would be placed on the possible role and the impact of armed forces on the preservation of these sites;***
 - ***Chief of UNOMC with a view to discuss possible synergies between the operations of UNOMC and the execution of the UNF project; and***
 - ***Representatives of other United Nations Agencies, with a view to reiterating the need to coordinate the strategic approaches of their respective programmes and to reinforce the impact of the UNF Project.***