

**Ninh Binh Statement of ASEAN Regional Conference on the roles of World Heritage Sites, Biosphere Reserves and Geoparks in Sustainable Development**

The ASEAN Regional Conference entitled "The 1972 Convention and Sustainable Development: Toward a synergy of the 1972 Convention and the MAB Programme" held in Ninh Binh, Viet Nam, from 11 to 12 September, 2012, organized by the Vietnam National Commission for UNESCO and the People's Committee of Ninh Binh Province, under the auspices of UNESCO, was attended by international delegates from ASEAN countries, China, Korea, representatives from UNESCO Offices in Ha Noi, Jakarta, Phnom Penh and over 100 delegates in various regions of Vietnam.

Over the years, the world heritage sites have made great contribution to local socio-economic development. The management of natural and cultural heritage in fast growing economies in Southeast Asia, is currently under a lot of pressure from population boom, the reduction of financial resources, challenges of climate change, and other issues, and is especially affected by the need to maintain a balance between the preservation of natural and cultural values and socio-economic development. Coordinating better between biosphere reserves and heritage sites in the region could help in achieving true sustainability and a genuine community participation.

Due to the diverse and often challenging social, economic, and educational contexts in Asia-Pacific countries, all the sites in the region need to foster the development and implementation of integrated policies, strategies, and management models in order to improve the living standards for local communities, and foster cooperation among countries on heritage conservation in the name of sustainable development.

Based on mutual respect and trust, and on shared experiences, the participants of the ASEAN Regional Conference entitled "The 1972 Convention and Sustainable Development: Toward a synergy of the 1972 Convention and the MAB Programme" collectively recognized and acknowledged the World Heritage Convention as an important tool and affirmed the following statement:

- 1) The government, relevant authorities and site managers should work together to ensure the preservation of the recognized Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage sites as well as

the alignment of national legislation with international agreements (The 1972 Convention for the protection of the Cultural and Natural World Heritage, The 2001 Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, The 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, Man and the Biosphere/MAB Programme and other international Conventions including Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat/Ramsar, Convention on Biological Diversity and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) and best practices while taking into account the specificity of the sites in order to enhance site protection and contribution to sustainable development to be applied more effectively locally.

- 2) Participation of local communities in the management of World Heritage and other UNESCO-recognized sites must be ensured so that they can apply their traditional skills, knowledge and practices in the protection of the sites while benefiting economically and socially from them. This will also ensure that the communities' intangible cultural heritage be valued and transferred from one generation to the next.
- 3) The public, and particularly young people, should be encouraged to learn more about the UNESCO-recognized sites and be given opportunities to be involved in the protection of the sites. This should be done through site education and outreach programmes, through which the public can improve their knowledge on the surrounding environment and raise their awareness of the need for site conservation.
- 4) Sites need to be conducive to scientific and social research, including database and case studies, the results of which should be disseminated among local stakeholders to inform decision-making. Links between sites and universities/research institutes should be fostered to promote working relationships and on-site visits by researchers, professors, and students.
- 5) Considering the impact of climate change on the Asia Pacific region and its high level of natural and environmental disaster risks, the communication, education, outreach and research programs at sites should pay special attention to the issues of climate change mitigation and adaptation, disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

Each State Party determines to promote the "Green Network" Initiative – a regional collaboration network to exchange experience on

management and preservation of heritage values among UNESCO-recognized sites – which plays an active role in conservation of cultural and biological diversity and sustainable development.

Endorsed by the participants of the ASEAN Regional Conference entitled “The 1972 Convention and Sustainable Development: Toward a synergy of the 1972 Convention and the MAB Programme”, Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam.

13 September 2012