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TWENTIETH SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

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Item 13 of the Provisional Agenda: World Heritage and Sustainable Development

13. World Heritage and Sustainable Development

SUMMARY

This document introduces the draft policy document aimed at integrating a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the World Heritage Convention, which had been requested by the Committee in its Decision **36 COM 5C**, as well as the actions that are envisaged.

This document is to be read in conjunction with *WHC-15/20.GA/INF.13*, which contains the draft policy document.

Draft Resolution: 20 GA 13, see Part III.

I. Background

1. The World Heritage Committee at its 34th session (Brasilia, 2010) welcomed the outcome of an expert meeting held in Paraty (Brazil) from 29 to 31 March 2010 on the relationship between the World Heritage Convention and sustainable development. The meeting agreed to consider policies and procedures that both maintain the Outstanding Universal Value of properties, as well as contribute to sustainable development, in the implementation of the *Convention*. At the request of the Committee, a second expert meeting on the topic took place in Ouro Preto (Brazil) in February 2012. The Ouro Preto meeting called for a stronger engagement of the World Heritage community with the sustainable development agenda, and to develop a specific policy responding to this need that would contribute to the objectives of the Strategic Action Plan and Vision 2012-2022, adopted by Resolution **18 GA 11** of the 18th session of the General Assembly of States Parties (UNESCO, 2011).
2. By its Decision **36 COM 5C**, adopted at its 36th session (St. Petersburg, 2012), the World Heritage Committee requested for the World Heritage Centre, with the support of the Advisory Bodies, to convene a small expert working group, and develop a policy proposal on the integration of sustainable development into the processes of the World Heritage Convention.
3. The goal of such a policy, as determined by the Committee, was to assist and guide States Parties, practitioners, institutions and communities to harness the potential of World Heritage properties, and heritage in general, to contribute to sustainable development. At the same time, this policy should also ensure that conservation and management strategies are appropriately aligned with broader sustainable development objectives. In the process, the primary objective of the World Heritage Convention to protect the world's cultural and natural heritage should not be compromised.
4. An expert group was thus established by the Secretariat and worked on a voluntary basis to develop a first draft of the policy document, based on the conceptual framework adopted at the wider UN level in the context of the discussions leading to the post-2015 development agenda. The methodology for the elaboration of the policy was endorsed by the Committee through its decision **38 COM 5D**, taken at its 38th Session (Doha, 2014).
5. The group of experts met for the first time in Cottbus, Germany, from 12 to 16 October 2014, together with representatives from the Advisory Bodies, in cooperation with the Technical University of Brandenburg and with financial support from the Government of Germany. A second workshop, enabled by a generous contribution from the Government of Viet Nam, took place in Ninh Binh, Viet Nam, from 22 to 24 January 2015. This workshop benefited from the participation of ten site managers from different regions, and a number of Vietnamese officials, which enabled constructive criticism from those who have experience implementing the Convention "on the ground".
6. The ensuing draft policy document also took into account the wealth of reflections, principles and recommendations produced by over 100 meetings and conferences that were held to mark the 40th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention in 2012, where the theme was "World Heritage and Sustainable Development: the role of local communities"¹, as well as the ongoing debate for the establishment of the UN post-2015 development agenda.

¹ An analytical summary of the events associated to the 40th Anniversary was prepared by the World Heritage Centre, and is available at the following address: <http://whc.unesco.org/document/128767>

7. The draft policy document was submitted for the Committee's consideration at its 39th session (Bonn, 2015). During the debate, Committee members expressed widespread support for the policy document. Some Committee members emphasized the need to reconcile conservation with development to ensure the long-term safeguarding of World Heritage properties. Committee members also noted that the situations among World Heritage properties may differ widely and stressed the importance of ensuring that the policy would not be too difficult for some States Parties to implement.
8. For these reasons, the Committee felt that further consultation with States Parties would be useful, and therefore requested that an opportunity was provided for States Parties to provide comments on the policy document prior to its submission to the General Assembly. The Committee also emphasized the need to ensure coherence between the draft policy document under consideration and the future overall *Policy Guidelines*, called for in paragraph 11 of the Committee's Decision **35 COM 12B** (UNESCO, 2011), where the scope and content is still in the process of being established. To this end, it was suggested that the sustainable development policy document might have to be slightly adjusted once the *Policy Guidelines* are adopted by the General Assembly. Furthermore, the Secretariat should also wait until the future *Policy Guidelines* are in place before developing proposals for changes to the *Operational Guidelines* that aim to translate the policies into actual procedures.
9. In a joint statement made at the 39th session of the Committee in Bonn, the Advisory Bodies expressed support for the draft policy document. The Advisory Bodies stressed in particular that this finally gave substance to the fifth "C" for communities, part of the strategic objectives adopted by the Committee at its 31st session (Christchurch, 2007), while also noting that certain aspects of the policy could benefit from more precision. Two NGO observers, one speaking on behalf of the Zoological Society of London and the Wildlife Conservation Society, and the other representing the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, also expressed their support for the draft policy. The speaker representing the Zoological Society of London and the Wildlife Conservation Society advocated for the implementation of strict no-go and no impact policies in relation to extractive activities in natural and mixed world heritage sites. The representative of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues welcomed the consideration given to the concerns of Indigenous Peoples in some of the draft policy document's provisions, but noted that there should be a way to make these provisions binding through clear changes to the *Operational Guidelines* and stressed the need to recognize Indigenous Peoples not only as stakeholders, but as right-holders.
10. In conclusion, the Committee endorsed the policy document and adopted decision **39 COM 5D**, for the policy document to be revised taking into account the outcome of the debate at the 39th session, the outcomes of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as comments received from States Parties, and submitted to the General Assembly for its consideration and final adoption.

II. Summary of Comments from States Parties

11. The policy document was therefore disseminated to all States Parties for comments via Circular Letter on 17 July 2015 and States Parties were requested to provide their comments by 31 August 2015. At the end of the consultation period, twenty-one States Parties had provided their comments and suggestions. A majority of the comments concerned specific drafting suggestions or issues of terminology. Others were of a more general nature and questioned the scope of the policy and the processes for possible implementation in the future. All the comments received were compiled by the Secretariat into a table, which also includes, in a separate column,

explanations by the Secretariat on how each comment had been addressed in the revised version of the policy document. The table is accessible online at: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/20ga/documents>.

12. The policy document was subsequently revised in close consultation with the Advisory Bodies to address the comments received from States Parties, while also ensuring consistency with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development² and the Sendai Framework for Action³, the latter being the key international policy on disaster risk reduction for the next fifteen years. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sendai Framework for Action, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 September 2015 and by the World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction on 18 March 2015 respectively, include for the first time, a number of important references to culture and heritage, which provide further support to the draft policy document and its principles. In its articulation, the draft policy document presented in document WHC-15/20.GA/INF.13 refers to many of the priorities identified in the above-mentioned documents, notably those more closely related to the scope of the World Heritage Convention.
13. The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies consider that the adoption of this policy would significantly help to harness the potential of world heritage in contributing to sustainable development, while ensuring the long-term protection of world heritage through a more harmonious relationship between conservation and development. The policy would also bring the *Convention* in alignment with a wide range of international policy instruments, including Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEA), in the broader framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies further note that the introduction of a sustainable development perspective provides a promising platform for the development of synergies between the World Heritage Convention and the other UNESCO culture Conventions, such as the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict and its Two Protocols (1954 and 1999), among others.
14. The World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies also agree that should the General Assembly adopt the draft policy document, it would be necessary to ensure coherence between this and the future *Policy Guidelines* of the World Heritage Convention. Therefore, it would be prudent to wait until the scope and structure of the future *Policy Guidelines* document has been endorsed by the Committee before specific changes to the *Operational Guidelines* are proposed to translate the draft policy document on sustainable development into specific operational procedures. Capacity-building initiatives are also needed to enable the effective application of the policy by the stakeholders concerned. These capacity-building initiatives include training programmes, guidelines that address specific dimensions of sustainable development, case studies, and indicators for measuring the progress of implementation.
15. In this respect, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies acknowledge that resources to undertake these much needed activities are currently not available. Without the necessary resources, the expected impact of the sustainable development policy would be significantly reduced. For this reason, States Parties are strongly encouraged to contribute extra-budgetary resources towards this significant endeavor.

² Accessible at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

³ Accessible at: <http://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework>

16. The draft policy document, revised at the request of the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee and contained in Document WHC-15/20.GA/INF.13 (accessible online at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/sessions/20ga/documents/>), is submitted to the 20th General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention for its consideration and adoption.

III. Draft Resolution

Draft Resolution: 20 GA 13

The General Assembly,

1. Having examined Documents WHC-15/20.GA/13 and WHC-15/20.GA/INF.13,
2. Recalling Decisions **36 COM 5C**, **38 COM 5D**, and **39 COM 5D**, adopted respectively at the 36th (Saint Petersburg, 2012), 38th (Doha, 2014), and 39th (Bonn, 2015) sessions of the World Heritage Committee,
3. Thanks the Technical University of Brandenburg, the Government of Germany and the Government of Viet Nam for their support in the development of the draft policy document on the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the World Heritage Convention;
4. Welcomes the work accomplished by the group of experts on a voluntary basis despite the lack of resources, under the coordination of the World Heritage Centre, and in close consultation with the Advisory Bodies, to develop the draft of the policy document annexed to Document WHC-15/39.COM/5D;
5. Notes the debate on this item that took place at the 39th session of the Committee (Bonn, 2015), the comments expressed by the States Parties on this draft through a broad consultation process, as well as the main outcomes of UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda;
6. Adopts the revised policy document for the integration of a sustainable development perspective into the processes of the Convention, as contained in document WHC-15/20.GA/INF.13;
7. Requests the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies to elaborate and submit for the consideration of the Committee – once a clear framework for the future Policy Guidelines, including its scope and structure, has been adopted by the General Assembly, and within the available resources – proposals for:
 - a) the necessary changes to the Operational Guidelines, which would translate the principles of the policy document on sustainable development into specific operational procedures,
 - b) indicators for measuring the progress of the policy's implementation;
 - c) capacity-building initiatives, needed to enable implementation, including an indication of the related costs;
8. Calls on States Parties to contribute financially towards this end;
9. Encourages the World Heritage Centre to sensitize States Parties, as appropriate, to the implications of the policy, notably in terms of the need to establish appropriate governance mechanisms to achieve the right balance between World Heritage and Sustainable Development, and integration between the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage properties and the pursuit of sustainable development objectives;
10. Also encourages UNESCO and the Advisory Bodies to widely disseminate the Policy Document as adopted by the General Assembly, and other related publications, to the world heritage community and the broader public, and promote its application;

11. *Recommends that Category 2 Centres and UNESCO Chairs related to World Heritage, and the wider network of the UNESCO Forum University and Heritage, prioritize issues related to the implementation of this policy within their capacity-building and research initiatives;*
12. *Further requests the World Heritage Centre to present to the General Assembly, at its 21st session in 2017, a report on the progress made in the implementation of the above provisions.*