

CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE  
CULTURAL HERITAGE: CHINA  
SACH SoC 2015-45

WORLD HERITAGE  
(C 707ter)

**REPORT ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF  
THE HISTORIC ENSEMBLE OF  
THE POTALA PALACE  
(China)**

STATE ADMINISTRATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE  
PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA  
NOVEMBER 2015

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The World Heritage Property of the Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace consists of 3 parts, i.e., the Potala Palace, the Jokhang Temple and the Norbulingka. Been reviewed and approved by the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, the Potala Palace was inscribed on the *World Heritage List* in 1994. The Jokhang Temple and the Norbulingka were respectively extended in 2000 and 2001. The Chinese government had long carried out the strictest conservation and management of the Potala Palace, the Jokhang Temple and the Norbulingka. In 1961 and 1988, the State Council of China announced that the Potala Palace, the Jokhang Temple and the Norbulingka as *State Priority Protected Sites*. We set up management offices, abide the principles of *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* and the *Operational Guidelines* and the *Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics* and relevant laws and Regulations, carry out a series of protection measures, strengthen management, invest heavily in heritage conservation, interpretation and presentation, and environment improvement and ensure the safety of both the property and its setting.

As a developing country, in the past more than 3 decades, the modern China has seen a fast economic growth and accelerated urbanization process. The conservation and management of the Historic Ensemble of the Potala Palace and its surrounding historical environment also encounter various challenges, such as heavy tasks for conservation, dramatic increase of population, demand for social development, needs for improvement of living conditions, drastic increase in number of tourists and the tendency of globalization. To address the aforesaid challenges, the Chinese governments at all levels have made a series of efforts in recent years to ensure the conservation of the OUV, Authenticity and Integrity of the World Heritage Property, including: approved Old Town of Lhasa (Barkhor Historic Area) as National Historically and Culturally Famous City and listed historic buildings inside the buffer zone of Jokhang Temple as Priority Protected Sites at different levels; improved administrative organizations and capacity building; carried out conservation projects

for the Potala Palace, the Jokhang Temple and the Norbulingka, which solved the structure stability and mural protection problems; launched old town area protection project to eliminate the safety risks and improve the living condition for the local people; restricted the total number of tourists and visiting time to control the negative impact brought by tourists and the belief and worship activities by the religious believers; prepared the Cultural Heritage Conservation Plans for the Potala Palace, Jokhang Temple and Norbulingka. According to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee decisions, the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH) will submit these plans to UNESCO World Heritage Centre before June 2016, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 40th session in 2016.

Regarding the two new commercial shopping malls, we considers that, in a general sense, even though have little impact on the overall environmental landscape at the Jokhang Temple area, but the Barkhor Mall and Shenli Mall did not yet affect the OUV, authenticity and integrity of the World Heritage Property. Even so, the Chinese government places high importance on this matter. Tibet Autonomous Region government and Lhasa municipal government, collaborating with the State Administration of Cultural Heritage (SACH), carried out reevaluation and remedial measures, right after receiving the UNESCO World Heritage Committee Decisions and Letters from World Heritage Centre. The local governments had requested the owner of the Shenli Mall to dismantle the whole glass house on the top of the mall, which was 3 meters high and caused light pollution to the visual corridor, and renovate the façade into traditional Tibetan architectural style. These measures, to some extent, impair and weaken the negative impact of the Shenli Mall on the visual corridor between the Jokhang Temple and the Potala Palace. Besides, the construction and utilization of these commercial buildings can play an active role in solving the employment of local Tibet, Han and other ethnic groups living in the old town area, as well as relieving the pressure from tourism on the protection and management of the property, and also guarantee the religion practice of the believers around the Jokhang Temple.

According to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee decision 38 COM 7B.10, the Chinese government invited Mr. Ronald Van Oers, representing the World Heritage Centre, Ms Mie Oak Chae, representing ICOMOS International and Mr Gamini Wijesuriya, representing ICCROM, to carry out the joint WHC/ICOMOS/ICCROM

reactive monitoring mission from 24 to 31 April, 2015. The experts carried out all-around and in-depth investigation into and evaluation of the conservation and management of the Jokhang Temple, Old Town of Lhasa (Barkhor Historic Area), Barkhor Mall, Shenli Mall, Norbulingka and Potala Place, by strictly following the requirements of the decision; exchanged opinions and made discussions on the conservation and management of the world heritage site with the stakeholders. They also provided many scientific and earnest opinions and suggestions on its conservation and management. The Chinese government sincerely appreciate and are special gratitude to the experts for their professional attitude, practical work style and dedication during the mission.

During the mission, the State Party designated a full-time doctor and nurse to serve the three experts, who constantly followed up and looked after their health conditions. But, unfortunately, Mr. Ronald Van Oers passed away due to sudden illness, on 28 April, 2015. After Mr. Ronald Van Oers' sudden illness occurred, our doctor made timely first aid right and meanwhile, the local government arranged the best medical team who spared no effort to provide emergency medical treatment for Ron. However, we failed to save him finally. The government of the State Party, SACH, all the Chinese colleagues who participate in this RM mission and medical staffs felt extremely sad and sorry for the unexpected loss of Mr. Ronald Van Oers. Please allow SACH to extend our deep condolence to the family and friends of Mr. Ron Van Oers, as well as to the UNESCO and Tongji University, for losing their dearest family member, friend and great colleague. And we are particularly grateful for the efforts made for, by the local governments and related authorities of the Tibet Autonomous Region and Lhasa City, Tongji University, WHITRAP and the UNESCO Beijing Office.