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 Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
 Ministry of Culture & Tourism
 Authority for Research & Conservation of
 Cultural Heritage

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 ቀን 28 JAN 2016
 Date

Dr. Mechtild Rössler
 Director World Heritage Center (UNESCO)
 7 Place de Fontenoy
 75352 Paris 07 SP
 France

Subject: **Response to the World Heritage Committee Decision**

Dear Dr. Mechtild,

In accordance with Decision (39 COM 7B 39), I am pleased to submit a progress report to the World Heritage Center on the issues raised by the World Heritage Committee, in the indicative format, for examination by the Committee at its 40th session in 2016. The report is therefore enclosed to this letter.

The State Party of Ethiopia would like to ensure the continued implementation of the World Heritage Convention (1972) to confirm the sustained preservation of world heritage properties elsewhere in the world.

Should you require further information, I always remain at your disposal.

Yours sincerely,

Yonas Desta
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 Please Quote Our Ref. No. When Replying



Government of Ethiopia

**STATE PARTY REPORT ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF
AKSUM (Ethiopia) PROPERTY ID C 12**

**IN RESPONSE TO THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE
DECISION: 39COM7B.39**

FOR SUBMISSION BY 1 FEBRUARY 2016

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Decision of the World Heritage Committee

Decision: 39 COM 7B.39

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-15/39.COM/7B,
2. Recalling Decisions **36 COM 7B.41** and **37COM 7B.38**, adopted at its 36th (Saint-Petersburg, 2012), and 37th (Phnom Penh, 2013) sessions respectively,
3. Congratulates the State Party for affirming its commitment to financing the consolidation project for the reinforcement of the foundation of Stele III and the investigation of the causes of the rising water level in the Tomb of the Brick Arches; and urges it to keep the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies updated on:
 1. any changes in the agreed-upon project document for Stele III,
 2. the results of the investigation of the rising water level;
4. Acknowledges the reported progress on the construction of the Church Museum but notes that it remains unclear how the façade will be amended to take account of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission's views and therefore, requests the State Party to submit relevant plans and drawings;
5. Also notes the reported development of the Management Plan for Aksum in close collaboration with the Department of Archaeology at Aksum University, and encourages the State Party to remain vigilant that the Plan ensures that critical viewpoints are maintained and tools put in place for monitoring visual impacts;
6. Further notes the development of the Thematic Master Plan and also requests that copies of these documents be submitted to the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies once they are finalized;
7. Reiterates the urgency of finalizing the clarification of the boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, according to the specifications for maps provided by the World Heritage Centre to the State Party, and also reiterates its request to the State Party to submit a minor boundary modification to the World Heritage Centre by **1 February 2016** for examination by the World Heritage Committee;
8. Also encourages the State Party to liaise closely with the World Heritage Centre in the development and implementation of the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project;
9. Further encourages the State Party to continue implementing the recommendations of the 2013 Reactive Monitoring mission, and further requests the State Party to invite an ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring mission to the property, before the end of 2015, to review the progress made on the above issues and to examine the state of conservation of the property;
10. Requests furthermore the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 February 2016**, an updated report, including a 1-page executive summary, on the state of conservation of the property and the implementation of the above, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 40th session in 2016.

Executive Summary

In response to the World Heritage Committee Decision (39COM 7B.39) at its Thirty-ninth session in Bonn, Germany 28 June - 8 July 2015, the State Party of Ethiopia generates the progress report on the State of Conservation of the Aksum World Heritage Site, which constitutes:

- A response to the World Heritage Committee Decision by providing detailed report on the issues raised by the Committee.
- Presents the progress report requested by the World Heritage Committee regarding the final plan of the building façade treatment of the Church Museum, the management mechanisms applicable to the property, the Consolidation Project for the foundation of Stele III and the causes of the rising water table inside the Tomb of the Brick and activities undertaken by the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development project (ESTDP).
- Provides the legal protection endorsed to regulate the Core as well as the Buffer Zone of the property, and the management mechanisms applicable to the site.

In follow up to the decision by the World Heritage Committee, the State Party of Ethiopia has been committed to work accordingly. Underneath is provided a comprehensive report that replies to all concerns raised by the Committee, for examination at its 40th session in 2016.

1. Responses of the State Party

Following the **Decision: 39COM7B.39** by the World Heritage Committee, detailed progress report is provided by the State Party underneath.

Paragraph 1.3 Updates on the progress of the Consolidation Project of the for Stele III foundation and the investigation of the causes of the rising water level in the Tomb of the Brick Arches;

a) Changes related to the Consolidation project Stele III foundation

The State Party would like to recall communications made with the World Heritage Center, seeking Technical and Professional support to implement the engineering project document for the Consolidation of the Stele III foundation. In response, the World Heritage Center has identified two Engineers, working for Studio Croci & Associati, to involve in the Consolidation Project of Stele III, possibly as a supervisor and/or a coordinator to implement the engineering project document in 2014.

As the UNESCO led international assistance effort failed to succeed, the government of Ethiopia decided to fully self-finance the Consolidation Project. The State Party also reiterates its commitments to fully finance the Consolidation Project for the Stele III, review and study the causes of the rising water table inside the Tomb of the Brick Arches. Contract licensing and communicating with the UNESCO recommended Studio Croci and the local company, MH Engineering, is undergoing.

In spite of this, the contract administration of the Project is determined to be in line with the regulation of the Ethiopian Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation. Accordingly the local company that was involved in the

reinstallation of Stele II, and with a thorough knowledge and good understanding of the Consolidation Project is being short listed for housing the UNESCO recommended actions. Currently, the technical and financial feasibility of the project is being updated so that the Project tender and award will be finalized in 2016.

b) Status of the investigation of the rising water level in the Brick Arches

As the causes of the rising water level is closely related to the destabilization of the foundation of Stele III, the investigation of the causes of the rising water table in the Brick Arches and the implementation phase of the result will be incorporated in the updated tender document of the Consolidation Project. However, the State Party will make sure that it will be incorporated to the international consultation project and the relevant experts from different local Universities will be involved in the implementation of the result.

Paragraph 1.4 Request for relevant plans and drawings for the amendment of the façades of the Church Museum;

The State Party would like to recall the submission of the detailed plan of the Church Museum, in soft copy, and then the plan for the façade of the museum where it was indicated that the design of the new museum building was basically planned to enhance the values of the world heritage property and its environ. However, in so far as the façade of the museum building is concerned, further agreement is reached with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church authorities to improve the surface treatment design based on the recommendations of the joint UNESCO/ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring Mission in 2013.

The Church Museum façade has also been under thorough review process to incorporate all the recommendations of the WHC. Accordingly, the construction of the museum building has been temporarily halted until the façade treatment design that harmonizes the new building to the visual integrity of the World Heritage Site, which is being developed to be submitted and approved by the relevant authorities. Until then, to comply to the spirits of the decision of the Committee, the project will remain on a complete halt.

Paragraph 1.5 Request for updates on the status of the Management Plan and to maintain critical viewpoints of the property;

In response to the Committee's request and to establish an appropriate management mechanism for the Aksum world heritage property, the site management plan has already been developed in close collaboration with the department of Archaeology in the University of Aksum. During the process, a series of consultation workshops were organized and detailed field surveys have been carried out to set priority actions for major conservation and development issues of the site. In accordance with the principles set in the world heritage management, the draft management plan document will also be presented to relevant stakeholders for its validation in 2016.

This planning document has also provided a monitoring mechanism to maintain the physical and visual integrity of the property and its critical view points and in effect to avoid undesirable influence from the Church Museum building.

Paragraph 1.6 Further request for the submission of the copies of Thematic Master Plan to the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies;

Within the framework of the master plan for the town of Aksum, a Thematic Master Plan was also developed by the regional state, to regulate future land use planning and development activities in Aksum. The Thematic Master Plan was designed to ensure that any development endeavor in the town of Aksum would be in line with the management of the world heritage property.

The Thematic master plan seeks to manage development activities in Aksum in a way that fits to the sustainable development of the property. The entire strategy of the plan will be achieved through detailed policies to standardize visitors' routes, site interpretation and other facilities, to accommodate sustainable tourism in the historic town. For detailed information the Thematic master plan has been attached to this document for review by the World Heritage Center and the Advisory Bodies (Appendix -1).

Paragraph 1.7 Request to finalize the clarification of the boundaries of the property and its buffer zone, and maps; and submission of a minor boundary modification request;

In response to the World Heritage Committee's previous request, the State Party invited the National Mapping Agency to delineate the boundary of the Aksum World Heritage property. While all the relevant data have been provided, physical survey has also been conducted by the Agency and results have been approved through several stakeholders' consultation at all levels.

As a result, the draft map of the boundary has been included in the law that protects the site and had been approved by the Council of Ministers in August 2015. This law has also established a Site Management Committee, involving different key stakeholders, to implement the site management plan and to make the management of the property participatory. The structural arrangement that goes to the site level, where an office, staffed with a site manager, a conservator and an expert responsible with site interpretation, has also been established by the same law.

As all the important attributes and features of the property have been included in the official boundary of the property, the State Party does not believe that a request for a minor boundary extension is still required.

The new proclamation that designates the boundaries of the Aksum world heritage site by delineating the Core and the Buffer Zones of the property, has also been attached to this report for further information (See also Appendix-2).

Paragraph 1.8 A Request for the State Party to liaise the development and implementation of the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project;

In response to the World Heritage Committee decision, the State Party would like to provide detailed information on the activities undertaken by the Ethiopian Sustainable Tourism Development Project (ESTDP) in Aksum.

The ESTDP has been closely working with ARCCH during all the planning and implementation of the conservation and site management interventions until December 2015 when the project was officially closed. During the project period, ESTDP was engaged in the planning and implementation of

four major components. These were Destination Development, Capacity Building, Small Scale Restoration and Community Engagement and the detailed activities undertaken in of each of the components are provided below. These are:

- i.** In relation to Destination Development, the first two major tasks undertaken by the project were illuminating and landscaping the main stele field and its surroundings. To make the old town of Aksum accessible in the evening, electric light has been installed in the stele field area and along the bypass road that connects the main stele field to the nearby roundabout located within the ancient city of Aksum. The landscaping activity involves designing and creation of cobblestone pavements along the main access path that leads to the main stele field and its surrounding. The project has also re-routed and cleared the old electric lines, which had visual interferences on the Stele Field.
- ii.** In connection to Capacity Building, successive hands on trainings have been given to the local community on craftworks that could contribute to product diversification. The training involved skills of making decorated objects by hand including weaving, woodcarving, pottery, basketry among others.
- iii.** In relation to the small scale conservation, minor restoration works have been carried out in the 17th century Cathedral of St. Mary and a couple of other vernacular residential houses located inside the boundary of the world heritage property. These conservation efforts were carried out in line with the basic procedures of the restoration principles so as to maintain the authenticity of the values of the world heritage property.

- iv. With regards to community engagement, the project was actively working to initiate various community associations to engage the local community (youth and women) in small scale enterprises.

Paragraph 1.9 Further requests to the State Party to invite an ICOMOS Reactive monitoring mission and submit an updated report to the World Heritage Centre;

In response to the request by World Heritage Committee, an ICOMOS Reactive Monitoring Mission has been invited in December 2015 to come to Ethiopia and examine the state of conservation status of the Aksum World Heritage property.

2. Other current conservation issues identified by the State Party

The vacant area within the old town of Aksum, left open due to the former relocation project, needs to be managed in a manner that enhances the Outstanding Universal Value of the property.

3. Potential restorations, alterations and/or new construction(s) within the protected area (Core Zone and Buffer Zone) that might be envisaged;

Restoration works carried out by the ESTDP in the old Cathedral of St. Mary as well as other vernacular historical houses were undertaken based on the fundamental procedures of the restoration principles to maintain the integrity and authenticity the world heritage property.

Appendix: 1 Thematic Master Plan of Aksum

Appendix: 2 Map of the Core and buffer zone of the site