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



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 Ref.No 01/14:1/202  
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 Date 19 1 MAR 2016

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

**Subject: Response to the World Heritage Committee Decision: 38 COM 7B.48**

Dear Dr. Mechtild,

In accordance with 38 COM 7B.48, it is my pleasure to submit the progress report to the World Heritage Center on the concerns raised by the World Heritage Committee, in the indicative format, for examination at its 40<sup>th</sup> 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 planet earth.

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

Yours sincerely,

  
 Yonas Desta  
 Director General



Cc:  
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 Please Quote Our Ref. No. When Replying



**GOVERNMENT OF ETHIOPIA**

**STATE PARTY REPORT ON THE STATE OF CONSERVATION OF  
THE LOWER VALLEY OF THE OMO, Ethiopia (C 17)**

**IN RESPONSE TO THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE DECISION  
38 COM 7B.48**

**FOR SUBMISSION BY 1 FEBRUARY 2016**

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## The World Heritage Committee Decision in the Thirty-eighth session

Doha, Qatar 15 - 25 June 2014

### Decision: 38 COM 7B.48

The World Heritage Committee,

1. Having examined Document WHC-14/38.COM/7B.Add,
2. Recalling Decision **37 COM 7B.39**, adopted at its 37th session (Phnom Penh, 2013),
3. Welcomes the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) on the potential impacts of the Ethiopian Sugar Development Corporation Project (Kuraz project) on the Lower Omo Valley;
4. Notes that this HIA indicates the potential for massive adverse impacts on the property from the irrigation and excavations associated with the development of sugar plantations, settlements and access routes, and also notes that there is conflicting information on the precise extent and location of the Kuraz project;
5. Strongly urges the State Party to provide as soon as possible clear documentation on the scope and extent of the project and its precise location with regards to the property, in order to clarify whether it is within the property or its buffer zone; and requests clear information on the impact on pastoral communities with regards to resettlement schemes;
6. Also recalls its request to the State Party to submit the final report of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) carried out in 2011 to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies;
7. Also requests the State Party to improve the HIA with a detailed cultural heritage assessment based on the precise details of the Kuraz project and the precise attributes of the property and to submit these to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies before any irreversible decisions are made;
8. Further notes that the State Party has obtained funding from the European Union Development Project, which will enable the boundary delineation and management plan to be developed in 2014/2015;
9. Encourages the State Party to carry out an assessment of fossil-bearing sediments, as recommended by the HIA, in order to more clearly define areas of potential archaeological importance;
10. Further requests the State Party to invite a joint UNESCO/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission to the property to consider the above issues and the potential impact of the Kuraz project;
11. Recognizes the high “Paleo-tourism” potential of the site noted in the HIA, and recommends that the State Party seek funding to test new tourism management tools,

which have been developed recently through the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme;

12. Acknowledges the State Party's urgent wish for international assistance for the site management plan and a possible extension of the property, and also encourages the submission of an International Assistance request to the World Heritage Fund before the next annual deadline of **31 October 2014**;
13. Requests furthermore the State Party to submit to the World Heritage Centre, by **1 December 2015**, a report, including a 1-page executive summary, on the state of conservation of the property, for examination by **the World Heritage Committee at its 40th session in 2016**.

## **Executive Summery**

In response to the World Heritage Committee Decision (**38 COM 7B.48**) at its Thirty-eight session in Doha, 28 June - 8 July 2015, the State Party of Ethiopia generates the progress report on the State of Conservation of the Lower Omo Valley World Heritage Site.

The report consists of a comprehensive response to the world Heritage Committee Decision (**38 COM 7B.48**) by providing detailed information on the issues related to the Lower Omo Valley WHS, which includes the progress report on the scope and extents of the proposed Kuraz Sugar Development Project, initiated by the government of Ethiopia in Southern Omo area and the benefits of the local community living around the site.

The report also shows the status of the EU-funded geo-mapping project, which is also expected to establish the management plan and the legal protection of the property. The report further mentions issues related to the report generated by the joint UNESCO/ICOMOS high level Reactive Monitoring Mission to the Lower Omo Valley world heritage property.

As a follow up to the decision of the World Heritage Committee, the State Party of Ethiopia has been committed to work likewise and will continue to implement the World Heritage Convention. The report will be available for examination by the Committee at its 40th session in 2016.

## Responses of the State Party

This document provides the progress report requested by the World Heritage Committee in its **Decision (38 COM 7B.48)** and related issues regarding the management of the Lower Valley of the Omo, World Heritage Site and the Kuraz Sugar Development Project initiated by the government of Ethiopia in the Southern Omo area. The report shows the progress made by the State Party regarding boundary delineation and the management mechanisms to regulate the world heritage property. Underneath is provided a comprehensive report that replies to specific concerns raised by the Committee, for examination at its 40th session in 2016.

### *Paragraph 5*

***Provide clear documentation on the scope and extent of the location of the Kuraz project and its precise location with regards to the property and its buffer zone; requests clear information on the impact on pastoral communities;***

With regards to the proposed development works of the Kuraz Sugar Development Project, the State party strongly believes that the Lower Omo Valley world heritage site, being among the most distinctive and important renowned World Heritage properties, should be entirely preserved not only for Ethiopia, but also for humanity as a whole. As a result the continued existence and enhancement of the world heritage property, with its Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and integrity preserved, was carefully considered during the planning period of the Kuraz project where the entire property zone the world heritage site and the potential fossil bearing sediments were incorporated in the planning documents of the project, along with the anticipated buffer areas the property.

In response to the requests by the World Heritage Committee regarding local community benefits, the responsible government organ, the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage, is working closely with the UNESCO liaison office in Addis Ababa, as the implementation partners of the EU-funded project, to directly benefit the local

community living around the World Heritage property through tourism development initiatives as part of the EU-funded project.

#### **Paragraph 6**

***Request on the final report of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) carried out in 2011 to the World Heritage Centre for review by the Advisory Bodies;***

*In response to the concerns raised by the Committee a joint technical committee that involves relevant institutions from both Kenya and Ethiopia has been established to deal with the procedural issues that could facilitate the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment to be carried out in the Lower Omo Valley and the Lake Turkana areas. Once the procedural issues as to how the SEIA could be carried out are finalized, appropriate professionals will be engaged to address SEIA issues.*

#### **Paragraph 7**

***Requests the State Party to improve the HIA with a detailed cultural heritage Assessment based on the precise details of the Kuraz project and the precise attributes;***

As the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines (2013) state, the State Party sought international assistance in 2014 and the grant has been approved in 2015, This grant will partly be used to improve the HIA report submitted by the State Party to the Committee in 2014, with detailed cultural heritage assessment of the property, based on the proposed initiatives of the Kuraz Project, to ensure the protection and management of World Heritage properties and its environ.

#### **Paragraph 8**

***Request for the advancement of the fund obtained from the European Union Development Project, which will enable the boundary delineation and management plan to be developed in 2014/2015;***

In response to the specific concerns raised by the WHC, in relation to boundary delineation and management mechanisms, the State Party in partnership with the European Union Development Fund has launched a project entitled “*Promoting the Contribution of World Heritage for Sustainable Development and Reinforcing Capacities*”



*for protection and conservation of Paleontological Sites in Ethiopia” on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2016 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.*

The primary intention of the EU-funded Project is to strengthen the capacity of the Culture Sector in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, specifically by enhancing national capacity building on the protection, conservation, promotion of the Lower Omo Valley Heritage Site and support the local community to improve their livelihood through job creation and income generating activities linked to cultural tourism. In this regard, the project envisions community support programs by providing handicraft skill trainings and entrepreneurship, with special focus on women and youth, to start small businesses which could easily be replicated for job creation

The State Party strongly believes that the issue of the Lower Omo valley can be best understood and addressed by the EU-funded geo-mapping procedures. The project is also expected to identify the areas of potential archeological importance and demarcate the boundary to finalize the geo-mapping issues and deliver maps for the identified core and buffer zones of the property. The project will also establish the site management plan for the lower Omo Valley World Heritage Site, and put in place adequate legislative, regulatory, institutional mechanism to ensure the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the property.

#### ***Paragraph 9***

***The State Party to carry out an assessment of fossil-bearing sediments in order to more clearly defines areas of potential archaeological importance;***

In response to the specific concerns of the World Committee, the State Party has planned to carry out an assessment on the fossil-bearing sediments and identify the potential areas of archaeological importance. This task will be carried out along with the boundary delineation of the property where specific survey works with detailed cultural heritage assessment of the property will be carried out.

#### ***Paragraph 10***

***Request for the State Party to invite a joint UNESCO/ICOMOS reactive monitoring mission to the property;***

In its decision 38 COM 7B.48, at its 38th session in Doha (June 2014), the World Heritage Committee requested the State Party of Ethiopia to invite a joint UNESCO World Heritage Centre-International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) Reactive Monitoring Mission (RMM) to the Lower Omo Valley to consider the conservation issues raised by the Committee in its previous decisions. Regarding the Lower Omo valley World Heritage Site (Ethiopia, C17), the World Heritage Committee (WHC) claimed that there is a potential for massive adverse impacts on the property from the irrigation and excavation activities associated to the Kuraz Sugar Development Project

In response to the decision (38 COM 7B.48), the government of Ethiopia has unequivocally demonstrated its commitment to the conservation of heritage sites by inviting the joint high level mission in April 2015 to come to Ethiopia and visit the Lower Omo Valley World Heritage property from 13 to 19 April 2015. The RMM was also engaged to assess the potential impacts of the Kuraz project as well as to meet officials from the relevant national authorities and representatives of the Ethiopian Sugar Corporation. The mission was also engaged to review the detailed cultural heritage impact assessment, evaluate the progress made by the State party in defining the areas of potential archeological importance, and discuss the European Union funded project for the geo-mapping of the Lower Omo Valley to clarify the boundary of the property.

Based on the above mentioned objectives the joint RMM mission came to Ethiopia mainly to assess the potential impact of the Kuraz Sugar Scheme on the Lower Omo Valley World Heritage property. The Mission has also met high government officials, policy makers, and the local community. At the end of its visit, the RMM concluded that there is *“no evidence to show that the property is being damaged by any project, nor is the authenticity of the property is subject to physical destruction or encroachment”*.

Following this developments, the joint RMM prepared a written report, which was received by the State Party in July, 2015. The report clearly stipulates that there is no evidence at all showing that the Kuraz Sugar Project affects the authenticity of the property and causes physical destruction or encroaches to the property. This finding clearly reiterates Ethiopia’s argument that its development endeavor must consider heritage sites by law to ensure the protection and management of World Heritage properties in its territory by putting in place adequate legislative, regulatory, institutional mechanism to ensure the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the natural and cultural heritage

sites. Therefore Ethiopia, if not exemplary, never lacks its commitment in this aspect. The RMM also recognizes the fact that appropriate legal and institutional frameworks are in place to ensure the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of the natural and cultural heritage sites in Ethiopia.

Accordingly, Ethiopia appreciates the RMM report. However, the report made unfounded recommendations, which requests the State party “to delay the Kuraz Sugar project until the completion of the EU funded geo-mapping project for the Lower Omo Valley,” which will demarcate the boundary of the property. The same report acknowledges that the property shows no obvious signs of damage and it cannot therefore be said that the State Party has failed to protect the world heritage property.

#### ***Paragraph 11***

***The State Party to seek funding to test the new tourism management tools developed through the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme;***

In response to the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee, the State Party wishes to seek funding to test the new tourism management tools, developed for the World Heritage Sustainable Tourism Programme, to create capacity building for all stakeholders and yield significant benefits to the local community in the region, the private sector, visitors and the scientific community.

#### ***Paragraph 12***

***Acknowledgement of the State Party’s request for the international assistance for site protection and possible extension of the property.***

In response to the World Heritage Committee’s acknowledgment, the State Party requested international assistance as per the World Heritage Convention Operational Guidelines for the conservation, protection and promotion of the Lower Omo World Heritage Site where the Committee has approved the grant in its 39<sup>th</sup> Session in Doha, Qatar. The State Party would like to thank the World Heritage Committee for its unfailing cooperation to encourage the State Party to implement the World Heritage Convention.

***Updates on new developments within the site***

To maintain the integrity of the Lower Omo Valley World Heritage Property, a management arrangement continues to be developed and will be implemented to manage any impact on the Outstanding Universal Value of the world heritage property.