

# **UNESCO World Heritage Centre**

Mission to Ethiopia (Addis Ababa, Aksum and Lalibela)  
14-20 December 2007

**Nada Al Hassan**

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## **1. Purpose of the mission**

The mission was aimed at implementing the Lalibela Conservation Action Plan Project financed by the Norway FIT as follows:

- Support and orient the Economic Development study with the UNESCO experts;
- Support and orient the Conservation study and the implementation of the Training workshop at Lalibela with the UNESCO experts;
- Inform and consultant the stakeholders in Lalibela with regard to the project and plan the next steps;

The mission also followed-up on the World Heritage Committee decisions for Lalibela regarding the supervision of the Lalibela shelters' project financed by the European Union.

In addition, the mission conducted a visit to Aksum to supervise the Aksum Obelisk re-erection works in progress and followed-up on the administrative and logistical procedures related to the project implementation.

## **2. Acknowledgments**

The author of this report wishes to express her thanks to Mr. Jara Haile Mariam, Director General of the Authority for Research and Cultural Heritage Conservation (ARCCH) for his strong support to the mission, and to all the persons with whom she worked in Lalibela, in particular to Aba Gebre Eyesus, the Head of the Lalibela Orthodox Church, Mr Mulugeta and Mr. Abebe Mengistu from the Culture and Tourism Department of the Lasta District who provided them with valuable information and close assistance throughout their presence on the field, to all the stakeholders met in Lalibela, and to Mr. Fisseha Zibelo, Director of the Tigray Culture and Tourism Office in Aksum.

Moreover, the author wishes to thank the UNESCO Addis Ababa Director, Mr. Nureldine Satti for his strong commitment and personal involvement in the World Heritage Centre projects concerned by this mission, and for providing her with all the needed guidance and contacts, as well as to Ms. Hirut Girma, Programme Specialist for Culture for her great support before and during the mission, and to Ms. Wafaa Neguede, the UNESCO Addis Administrative Officer for her invaluable administrative support in implementing the decentralized activities.

## **3. Lalibela Conservation Action Plan**

Five experts were recruited prior to the mission in order to implement the activities of the Lalibela Conservation Action Plan: Pietro Laureano as Team Leader to the Conservation

activities, Debora Giorgi and Mezimer Abiy as Assistant team leaders, as well as Rafael Matos and Negussie Simie as Economic Development specialists.

My visit to Lalibela thus concentrated on agreeing with the experts on their field activities (rationale, contents, planning the next steps), discussing with the stakeholders the contents of the experts' work and facilitating it.

### **3.1 Economic Development**

Mr. Negussie Simie collected information on all the recent and on-going national and international tourism documents and initiatives in Lalibela. Mr. Rafael Matos interviewed all the stakeholders individually and in the multi-stakeholders meetings, collected field information and made several visits in Addis Abeba and Lalibela to the tourism related venues or training centres. Both experts should provide WHC with a sustainable tourism development strategy at Lalibela.

Having noted the great number of projects on-going in Lalibela (World Bank, UNWTO, USAID, etc.), I agreed with the experts to address only the economic development issues that correspond to the added value of UNESCO in the field of sustainable tourism development: these include site interpretation and the visitors' centre, cultural industries development, communication and dissemination tools, education, protective measures, future vision of the tourism in Lalibela and tourism circuits in the region.

The experts' report is due end of February 2008.

### **3.2 Conservation**

The mission of the UNESCO experts was programmed in coordination with World Monuments' Fund, our partner in the implementation of the Lalibela Action Plan.

While in the field, Ms. Debora Giorgi and Mr Mezimer Abiy, the Assistant team leaders that we recruited to accomplish the conservation tasks in Lalibela, have started their work. They were joined by the Team Leader after my departure and the World Monuments Fund Team:

**Ugo Tonietti** – Structural Architect – Professor of Structural Mechanic – University of Florence - Italy

**Luisa Rovero** – Structural Architect - Professor of Structural Mechanic – University of Florence - Italy

**Fabio Fratini** – Geologist – Expert in conservation of Stone materials – CNR – Institute for Conservation and Enhancement of Cultural Heritage - ICVBC – Florence -Italy

**Riccardo Sabbadini** – Geologist – GIS expert

**Marcella Isola** – Architect – GIS expert

The Conservation team had the following mission objectives:

- a. In close collaboration with UNESCO, the central and the regional authorities in Ethiopia, propose a church that is best appropriate to carry out a pilot project for the conservation and training activities contemplated in the project; these activities concern the waterproofing and surface treatment project of the church, a training workshop in lime mortar techniques, and a pilot project in surface treatment of the chosen church;
- b. Analyze the causes of decay at the church chosen for the pilot project; conceive a pilot conservation project for this church; supervise the production of the necessary documents and drawings to be undertaken by the Assistant Team Leader appointed by UNESCO for the implementation of the pilot project;
- c. Analyze all previous relevant reports and studies conducted in Lalibela and coordinate finds and proposed activities with the on-going conservation initiatives undertaken by entities other than UNESCO, in particular with World Monuments Fund, and ensure appropriate scientific coordination with the relevant actors;
- d. Organise the logistical aspects for training workshop for a group of local Lalibela workers on the use of lime mortars, ideally a group of 25-35 workers
- e. Advise on the recruitment process of the local workers and the Construction Company to be appointed by UNESCO.

The reports received by the experts following this mission show that they met the above objectives. A next mission is foreseen end of February by the two Assistant Team Leaders to prepare the logistics of the training workshop in lime mortars.

The Church chosen for the pilot project is Biet Gabriel Rufael; formerly we had chosen Biet Mercurios Church but the team leader advised not to work on it because of its archaeological and structural complexity. The training course will take place in a hewn trench in the site.

Community leaders have expressed their reluctance to undertake the pilot project on a hewn church in the Lalibela Region to avoid hindering the sacredness of the site and taking risks in terms of experimental restoration techniques. This issue will be discussed further during the project implementation in particular by explaining that the pilot project is reversible and concerns only the surface impermeabilization of the churches.

The pilot project will be based on the conservation studies undertaken by the team working under the WMF part.

The Survey team led by Heinz Ruther (Cape Town University) and employed by WMF should also work on the field survey of Lalibela from 4 to 20 February 2008.

The mission to Lalibela started with a long meeting in presence of the mission members (Rafael Matos, Negussie Simie, Debora Giorgi, Mezemir Abiy) with the following stakeholders: the Lalibela Head of the Ethiopian Church, the Head of the Lasta District (Woreda) Administration, the Mayor and the Vice Mayor of the Municipality, the Head of the Lasta District Culture and Tourist Main Office, and two representatives of the community designated by the inhabitants of Lalibela.

We explained the project objectives, the activities and the specific objectives of the mission.

## **The EU funded Shelters in Lalibela**

We noted that the stakeholders often made an amalgam concerning the responsibility of UNESCO in the EU funded shelters' project. The Community has had several problems with the construction team in the past months and put the blame on UNESCO during this meeting. We had to clarify that we were not involved and invited them to discuss their concerns openly with the representatives of the construction company (the problems concern accidents during the constructions of the shelters).

In addition, the stakeholders raised the issue of the shelter that is being constructed at Aba Libanos. They are indeed concerned about its impact on the stability of the church since two of its pillar will rest on the church's roof. The Lasta district office has halted the construction and has asked written to the ARCCH asking for assurance on the church's stability.

The UNESCO and WMF conservation teams later examined the situation at Aba Libanos after I left Ethiopia and advised not to build any pillar on the hill over Aba Libanos. They prepared an alarming technical report in this regard and WHC transmitted it to the Ethiopian Minister of Culture after having consulted ICOMOS. The letter and the report are in Annex 2.

## **Problems with the Community**

### **3.2.1 Meeting in Addis Ababa with Mr. Jara Haile Mariam, Director General, Authority for Research and Cultural Heritage (ARCCH)**

The mission to Lalibela started with a long meeting with Mr. Jara attended by Mr

A de-briefing meeting with Mr. Jara also took place after the field visits. Having noted the great deal of initiatives undertaken by the local authorities in site management and in particular in tourism management, both parties agreed to expand the search on the existing studies and projects, were they national, regional, international or civil society initiatives, to build on and support the current initiatives, and to continue the participatory planning approach with the stakeholders.

Several matters were discussed with him and led us to the agreeing on the following:

- The choice of the workers to be trained in lime mortar techniques in the framework of the project will be done according to the technical criteria defined by UNESCO, and chosen by the local authorities. The remuneration fees and/or DSA are to be discussed also with the regional authorities, who can best advise on the rates and modalities of payment;

- Mr. Jara has identified the National Conservation Architect foreseen in the project; Mr. Mammo Getawo from Bahir Dar, who has developed field experience in conservation techniques, in particular in lime mortars, after working in the World Bank funded Project at the World Heritage site of Fasil Ghebbi in Gondar;
- Mr. Jara had not yet identified the local economic development expert
- Mr Jara agreed to provide the ARCCCH support in choosing the construction company that should ensure the construction management and technical aspects of the restoration works. It was agreed that the ARCCCH would contact accredited Ethiopian companies to take part in the procurement procedures to be launched by UNESCO, and would take part in the technical evaluation of the bids.

### **3.2.2 Meeting with Mr. Tesfaye Desalegne Biwota, Head of Tourism, Marketing and Promotion Department (Ministry of Culture and Tourism).**

Mr. Bitowa explained that Lalibela is a flagship destination in Ethiopia and constitutes a pilot project for tourism management and development and expressed his readiness to offer cooperation to the UNESCO Lalibela initiatives. In addition, he added that the relatively recent merging of Tourism and Culture in the same Ministry facilitates cooperation and explained that Ethiopia being a decentralized country, most decisions are taken at regional, local level.

Mr. Bitowa participated in the team that prepared the World Bank study “Towards a strategy for pro-poor tourism Development”. This strategy proposes two main objectives: 1. making Ethiopia among the ten leading destinations in Africa by the year 2020 and improving the quality standards for services and products and 2. linking tourism development to poverty alleviation.

### **3.2.3 Meeting with Ms S. Barnes Country Director, UNDP**

The meeting was also attended by Mr Takele Teshome, Programme Analyst for Food Security and Recovery.

UNDP has a food and security programme at Lasta – Lalibela that concern the District and the Region. Useful data and analysis on the situation could be summarized as follows: food shortage during 5 to 6 months per year; weak potential for local agriculture, poor soil, traditional irrigation system to be rehabilitated and expanded, potential for small greenhouses for vegetable production, use of micro-credits.

UNDP is open to cooperation with UNESCO despite the fact that culture is absent from the UNDAF programme and advised the mission to contact UN HABITAT for sewage and solid waste issues in Lalibela.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention that in the framework of the Spanish Millennium Development Goals Achievement Fund, UNDP prepared a Cultural Diversity and Development project (June 2007) in cooperation with several UN agencies of which UNESCO, and where the Culture related activities are estimated to USD 3,48 out of a total of USD 5,75.

To avoid duplication of projects, dispersion of budgets and energy, and to give more efficiency to a local action plan in coordinating means and competences, the mission proposed to the UNDP Country Director that conservation and tourism development projects at World Heritage sites be coordinated by UNESCO under the authority of the ARCCH Director.

#### **3.2.4 Meeting with the stakeholders in Lalibela**

The mission members called for a multi-stakeholder meeting in Lalibela to explain the project objectives, to consult the stakeholders on the project initiatives, to collect information relevant to the project, and to launch the site management process as requested by the World Heritage Committee. Two consecutive meetings took place, in the presence of the Lalibela Head of the Ethiopian Church, the Head of the Lasta Woreda Administration, the General Director of the Municipality, the Head of the Lasta District Culture and Tourist Board, the Head a.i. of the Regional bureau for Culture and Tourism and two representatives of the community designated by the Lalibela inhabitants. These long meetings clearly revealed to the mission members that the participatory approach is common practice in Lalibela, and that the traditional social structure favored consultation and dialogue, leading the regional public administrations and the local Church administrators to often have recourse to it.





Multi-stakeholders meeting in Lalibela

### **3.2.4.a Master Plan**

The mission members were shown a Master Plan ratified by all the relevant authorities. This Master Plan showed the site limits and its buffer zone. It is to be noted that the Nomination file of Lalibela did not have these elements and that having them now constitutes a great basis for the start-up of the Site Management mechanism.

Nevertheless, to be considered official, these new data need to be completed (geographical coordinates) and sent officially to the World Heritage Centre as part of the Retrospective Inventory.

The Master Plan shows clearly delimited areas reserved for tourist infrastructures and hotels. These areas are close to the limits of the archaeological site, and although attention is given to integrate the new constructions in the landscape (maximum heights, use of traditional materials), tourism infrastructure still can threaten the landscape integrity.

It is planned to modify the Master Plan of the site in 2008; therefore the current UNESCO WHC initiatives are important to support the authorities in shaping the new Master Plan in terms of land use, density, visual integrity, future expansion of housing areas, of new tourism and development infrastructure and access roads, environmental protection, etc.



Plan showing the Lalibela site limits and buffer zone

### **3.2.4.b Output of the multi stakeholders meeting**

During these meetings, the following was agreed:

- The stakeholders are in favour of the project and they will support its implementation;
- The stakeholders asked for detailed and regular communication on the project and for total transparency;
- A public meeting will be organized for the local community where the UNESCO members will explain the project and raise awareness on the management of the site; a screening of Patrimonito in Lalibela is also foreseen;
- Benchmarks for site management will be set in order to move forward. For the next encounter (November 2007), the stakeholders agreed to collect all relevant information such as the local regulations related to the Master Plan and Tourism related laws and decisions. These documents being in Amharic it was agreed to send them to the UNESCO Addis Office for translation with the Project funds.

#### **4. Tourism**

The Government of Ethiopia's long term vision is to make the country one of the top ten tourist destinations (one of the 10 last at present) in Africa by the year 2020 with an emphasis on reducing poverty, controlling the impact of tourism and utilizing tourism to transform the image of the country (Former Minister of Culture and Environment, 1999). The Millennium celebrations that stretch out from 11 September 2007 to 11 September 2008 are currently used as part of a marketing strategy by the Government and the tourism private sector to give a strong push to the tourism sector and to attract more visitors.

Lalibela is Ethiopia's flagship destination and major driver of the most popular tourist circuit of Ethiopia, the Northern Historic Route (Gondar, Lalibela, Axum), with 19 185 visitors (2006, LTCO) that represent about 80- 90% of the flow of leisure tourists to Ethiopia (total visitors number to Ethiopia estimated 150 000 in 2006, WB report 2006). Lalibela appears to be a key destination in the Government's objective to increase tourism in quality and for generating receipts and in the fight against poverty.

To cope with the increase of tourists – mainly 50-60 years old (WB 2006) and backpackers coming mostly from North America and Western Europe – some 8 new hotels (200 beds) and lodges (100 beds) will be completed within the next few years, and will add to the 402 beds available in the 12 existing hotels.

The multi-stakeholders meetings clearly showed that the religious and spiritual values of the site were the most important elements to be taken into consideration in the current and future site management and tourism planning. The participants were in favor of “tourism that respects the identity and spirituality of Lalibela”.

The local stakeholders were in general in favour of tourism and its development and viewed tourism as an economic resource.

Foreign tourists praise the beauty and unique spiritual atmosphere of the site but complain mostly about children harassment – in decline, since strong actions have been implemented – incoherent and high prices of handicraft products and hotel rooms, in comparison with their quality.

##### **4.1 Evaluation of threats linked to Tourism Development**

A detailed evaluation of the threats affecting the property was undertaken in the UNESCO-ICOMOS-ICCROM Reactive Monitoring Report of June 2006. The threats related to tourism have been looked into more in detail and are summarized in the following paragraph.

Because of the quite small number of tourists, tourism pressure in flows and infrastructure does not at the present time put the site's value, its authenticity and integrity in danger, but the site is fragile and urgent management measures are to

be taken to anticipate an expected and planned increase of tourist flows at Lalibela, and the construction of infrastructures.

What makes the comparative advantage of the Lalibela destination is its Outstanding Universal Value, the preserved authenticity and integrity of the churches and of the landscapes around the site, the spiritual and quiet configuration of the site and of the traditional village of Lalibela with its inhabitants. The “sense of the place” associating the tangible, the intangible culture, the living and environmental heritage, is what makes the spiritual and economic value of Lalibela, and that should be protected in priority for this reason.

This vision is also shared by the visitors’ notes in the Airport Tourist book.

Tourism growth is now limited (an average of 25 % a year) by the number of beds available in the village and by not easy access by coach or by plane (mostly 52 seats Fokker) and 25 km of good but sinuous road. At site, the narrow paths to access the churches and their small capacity, added to the absence of any visitor’s center to disseminate the number of tourists, can give rapidly an impression of over-capacity on the site, in particular during the high season (December to March).

The paved road that crosses the site and the village is presently used mostly by pedestrians and mules, rarely by tourist shuttles, but could quickly, if used by cars and shuttles in number, spoil the site, and destroy the fragile spiritual, historical and cultural setting, and thus damage its tourist attractiveness to speak in economic terms.

The pressure of tourism infrastructures, mainly hotels, urban settlements and development infrastructures (power plant, chicken incubators) often built too close to the World Heritage site, constitute a real threat that could rapidly grow in the future, thus strongly affecting the integrity and value of the site, and could damage the environment that is part of the site’s value. Future buildings for new settlers and tourists, and infrastructure constructions should be planned out of the buffer zone, to protect the site’s visual integrity.



Two new hotels seen from Biet Giorgis Church

Moreover, Mr. Jara evoked the interest of big investors to build hotels at Lalibela and the project of a cable car that would bring tourists from the Airport (25 km). Special attention should be given to such projects since tourism facilities and entertainment activities should not spoil the spiritual, historical, cultural and environmental values of this fragile site.

The regional Amharra authorities are aware that large scale investments can cause damage to the site and the environment if not carefully planned. Indeed, to avoid increasing the construction density in and around Lalibela, an on-going lodge project is being built several kilometers away from the site and even new housing projects for the local population are being built away from the archaeological area. This planning tendency should be reinforced through clear urban regulations and should appear in the planned up-dating of the Lalibela Master Plan.

#### **4.2 Pilgrimage and church services**

In addition to foreign visitors, Ethiopian Pilgrims represent the largest number of visitors: during a few days each year in January and April<sup>1</sup>, some 80 – 100 000 pilgrims gather at Lalibela for religious celebrations, sleeping in tents or in private houses. The pressure they exert on the site is very high and concentrated in two

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<sup>1</sup> Pilgrims go to Lalibela in large numbers mainly for Christmas, Epiphany (January the 19<sup>th</sup>) and Easter.

punctual and rather short occasions. The local authorities do their best to accommodate the pilgrims' needs but there seems to be a great need to improve their reception, mainly sanitary needs, availability of water and medical assistance.

Tourist are also numerous at these dates, but no more than a few hundreds, and a cohabitation with pilgrims does not seem to be problematic.

Church rituals and services are very important in Lalibela and the local community is very observant to religious customs. Nevertheless, some religious services are postponed or interrupted to accommodate foreign visitors. In the future, measures should be suggested to the local authorities to give the priority to the religious use of the site by the population and pilgrims over tourists at the churches.

### **4.3 Actions taken by the Lasta District Culture and Tourism Office (LCTO)**

In cooperation with the Church, the municipality, the local community leaders and the district public administrator, the LCTO is pro-active in the field of tourism. The LCTO has very limited financial and human resources means, but its actions are rooted in the community, and the approach of its employees is centered on improving quality of tourism services, fighting unemployment, on training and poverty alleviation.

Indeed, the LCTO actions are remarkable for their pertinence to address key issues linked to tourism. These concern improving the capacity of tourism personnel and crafts persons by 1) organizing locally managed training programmes for crafts persons (weaving), tourist guides, hotel waiters and waitresses, mule drivers, and even the head priest of each church, 2) dealing with children's behaviour with the tourist and with the presence of beggars on the site and preventing systematic rural population influx into Lalibela.

The LCTO also works with volunteers by involving local youth associations to clean the site and install garbage bins in the archaeological site.

A code of conduct for foreign tourists is published in the form of leaflets distributed in the hotels and at the Tourist Office, and on signs at the entrance of the archaeological site; it concerns the history of the site and its significance, as well as the recommended behaviour, dress code, respect of religious ceremonies, recommended actions in relations with tips.

A tourist book at the airport lounge is open to remarks by the tourists after their visit and is regularly used by the LCTO as a reference for the improvement of services and products.

The needs expressed by the LCTO are to benefit from more qualified training for all tourism services in order to reach international standards, ideally by highly qualified trainers who would also tutor local trainers.

The interpretation of the site is a subject that is still not addressed by the LCTO, and that would gain at being part of the site management initiatives. As mentioned in the previous Monitoring Missions to Lalibela, most probably, in each of the churches' group, the site was visited gradually, starting from the lowest point to the highest one, from the smallest church, to the largest. In addition, each group, and the church of Biet Giorgis were surrounded with trees (mostly Olive trees) some of which have survived. This vegetal enclosure may have referred to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem; it certainly constituted a feature of the site, signaling the presence of the churches from afar and the sacredness of the site. In coordination with UNESCO, World Monuments Fund experts will start an archaeological and historical study of the site, not only to form the basis of the conservation decisions, but also to allow the interpretation of the site, and the definition of visiting circuits, as well as the narrative that the tourist guides will provide.

The European Union funded project includes the construction of a Visitors' Centre at the actual entrance of the site (which in principle should be the exit point of Group 1). Unfortunately, this location could not be changed, and any interpretation project should integrate this building in the most positive way.

Moreover, the Lalibela churches have no signposts. The architecture, the characteristics and the atmosphere of the site are incompatible with any other physical intrusion and should be avoided. Leaflets, maps and books should replace any intrusive signposts.

The LCTO has very recently manufactured road signposts and one for the entrance of the site. Their forms, colors and materials are aesthetically not appropriate.

Finally, no mention of Lalibela being a World Heritage Site is visible on any printed material or signpost. It would be important to raise awareness on the need to integrate this element in any foreseen communication tool.

#### **4.4 Sustainable Tourism Development**

While recognizing that many good initiatives have been taking place in the field of tourism, there would be need for a general vision and long term strategy. Lalibela is lacking a Public - or Tourists - Use Management Plan. Such a plan needs to be developed as a fundamental part of the integrated management plan of the site requested by World Heritage Committee at its 31<sup>st</sup> Session, conceived and implemented at the local, regional and central levels, and integrate the local community needs.

The Outstanding Universal Value of a World Heritage site is the starting point of a tourism strategy and management plan. A Public Use Plan should be based on a

long term vision of tourism and development at Lalibela, and should envisage a de-concentration of tourists whenever possible by developing infrastructures, activities and accommodation a few kilometers away from the site in order to preserve its values and integrity. Such a plan should also include the protection and rehabilitation of the environmental setting of the site

Concerning “Tourism Products”, there is a gap between the potential of the site, its attractiveness and the purchasing power of visitors and the quantity and quality of services and products offered at the site.

The supply chain of tourism infrastructures, services, visiting circuits and products does not match the tourist’s demand in terms of quality and variety, in particular the demand of cultural tourists. Indeed, apart from the hotels, there are very few restaurants and cafes accessible to tourists. Handicrafts are below the required quality and specificity; metallic crafts (crosses, jewelry), painted leather, wood articles and textile, are only partially locally made and. There are no available books on Lalibela and Ethiopia, and a lack of good quality postcards and pictures of the site as well as no CDs of local and national traditional and modern Ethiopian music.

This gap in the supply chain means that there is a potential for extra receipts from tourists and as a consequence for extra local employment, directly (hotel services, tourist guide, mule drivers, restaurants, handicrafts, souvenirs) and indirectly (maintenance and restoration of the World Heritage site, transport, agriculture, herding, building, food industry...) linked to tourism.

The creation of eco-cultural tourism circuits – some already exist - to bring tourists to the churches around Lalibela, and to keep tourists one or two extra days at Lalibela, in addition to the average length of stay (one or two days) is another means of developing tourism in neighboring rural areas. Such a programme should be viewed at a larger scale in coordination with the WHC activities in Ethiopia’s natural sites, and with the planned USAID Ecotourism Development Project.

Private house accommodation could also provide revenues for the households but the general poor living conditions of the inhabitants are not yet compatible with the minimum comfort and sanitary conditions required by tourists.

## **5. Economic and community development**

20 000 persons live in Lalibela, and the village is equipped with electricity and water, but needs a sewage and solid waste treatment system. Some villagers are employed in the hotels, transport services craft sales, tourist guiding, supply of goods, restaurants, building and conservation works at churches.

A visit at the Saturday market shows the poor agricultural and livestock resources of the district of Lalibela, insufficient to feed the local population and the tourists. This was



confirmed by Mr Takele Teshome (UNDP Food Security and Recovery Programme) who mentioned that the village is subject to food shortage 5 to 6 months a year due to the poor fertility of the soil and the small size of tenures.

Water resources are limited in Lalibela and although households receive running water, it is only available a few hours a day and becomes limited during dry seasons. Hotels consume large quantity of water and are given priority in the water supply system (hotels are never completely out of water even in very dry seasons). It is therefore very important to carefully plan tourism development projects by taking into account the needs of the inhabitants and the farmers by planning environment friendly projects that take into account the available water resources.

The Lasta district Tour and Travel Managing Expert, Mr. Abebe Mengustu, informed the mission members that a water pipe project is currently under construction to bring water from the airport area to the Lalibela village. More details on the issue of water supply should be sought and brought about in the future work that UNESCO will be doing in Lalibela, particularly in the area of site management.

The “Conservation Action Plan for the Rock Hewn Churches, Lalibela” is aimed at involving the local community and the Church in the conservation and management processes, empowering the local community by giving it an active role in the project and developing job generating activities.

In addition to creating jobs in the field of conservation techniques one international and one national expert in economic development are foreseen to undertake a joint study that addresses development possibilities and management mechanisms in the fields of tourism, conservation techniques, materials and skills, as well as arts and crafts production. Their recommendations will be developed in the future phases of the project, and will build on previous and current UNESCO initiatives in the field of crafts development in Ethiopia and in Lalibela, in coordination with other on-going projects, be them national or international (World Bank, UNDP, NGOs, etc.).

Improving the standard of living of the community can be done by generating new jobs (site conservation and maintenance, agricultural projects, tourism), but could also benefit from part of the entry fees at the World Heritage site. Creating a fund for educational, sanitation, health and infrastructure projects (transport, water supply, sewage, electricity) at Lalibela out of the entry fees could be explored; such investments should be made to benefit equally to the tourists and the local population and would justify for the tourists a higher entry fee – 15 % is the percentage proposed usually. This fund could also support recreational activities for the civil society in general and the youth in particular through their dynamic associations. The feasibility and of such an initiative will have to be studied by the experts further in the project.

It is clear that job generating activities should be considered at the district and regional levels, and not only at the Lalibela village. In this respect, the economic study to be

undertaken by the UNESCO experts should advise on optimizing the benefits of tourism on the Lalibela local inhabitants.

While the international expert is now identified, the mission allowed establishing contacts with a potential national consultant.

### **5.1 National Expert in Economic Development**

The mission met with Mr Kejela Gemtessa, the head of a Consultancy Company of some 20 specialists, which fields of activity includes food security, irrigation, pastoral community development, skills training in urban development, water, sanitation, education. The Company is registered at the (former) Ministry of Planning and Economic Development and (former) Ministry of Trade, Industry and Tourism (1998). He worked for Ethiopian public institutions and International cooperation agencies including JICA-Japan, CIDA-Oxfam, World Bank, SCF-UK, IFAD-FAO, GTZ-Germany, USAID and on development projects for the Amhara Region (Lalibela).

During a meeting held at UNDP, Mr Takele Teshome (Programme analyst, Food Security and Recovery Programme UNDP) recommended another candidate, Mr Kelkilachew Ali who will be contacted in the next WHC mission.

The survey undertaken on the field so far shows a great deal of initiatives is underway in the Lalibela region and at the central level, by international development organizations. Therefore, it appears that the first task of the National Expert should be to collect information on the existing laws, regulations, and initiatives related to development and in particular to tourism, as well as on all development projects and the civil society initiatives. Then, it will be possible to undertake - in close cooperation with national and local authorities- a study that supports, reinforces, and complements existing initiatives, and if necessary, propose new initiatives. M. Jara Head of ARCCH totally agreed with this approach.

## **6. Conservation**

The mission members recalled to the stakeholders the conservation problems in Lalibela, and the technical evaluation of the UNESCO experts in this field<sup>2</sup> (composition of the stone and presence of clay, dilatation of the monolithic churches, heavy weight of some original roofs, land sliding, humidity and rain). They explained that the shelters under construction would solve only part of the conservation problems, but would not stop the churches' decay. The mission members also said that ultimately, the aim of the project was to find a permanent solution that would allow dismantling the shelters and creating

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Reactive Monitoring Report by UNESCO WHC, ICOMOS, ICCROM – June 2006

new jobs for the benefit of the local community through training and regular maintenance works.

The stakeholders reaffirmed their agreement on using Biet Mercurios for the pilot conservation project but asked “not to change anything in the church”. It appeared in fact that there should be a patient and didactic approach to the training workshop and restoration works because any action on the churches is felt as an intrusion to its integrity. The conservation team to be appointed by UNESCO should be aware of this very sensitive issue and awareness raising activities should be organized on the use of lime mortars, their compatibility with the hewn stone, their reversibility and their very probable use on these churches in the past (traces of mortar on Biet Mariam).

Indeed, the stakeholders mentioned that Angelini made mistakes in Lalibela and that future works should avoid these mistakes “such as the new materials he added on the churches’ surfaces”.

As outlined above, Mr. Jara has identified the National Conservation Architect foreseen in the project; Mr. Mamo from Bahir Dar, who has developed field experience in conservation techniques (lime mortars). Mr. Mamu was supposed to meet the mission members at Lalibela but could not come. The competence of Mr. Mamu was also confirmed by other sources. His role in the awareness raising activities will be very important for the project continuation.

### **6.1 Training of local workers in conservation techniques (restoration works)**

During the numerous meetings with Mr. Abebe (LCTO), it appeared that the District decision makers try as much as possible to orient their capacity building activities by taking into account the poverty factor. Unemployed persons are systematically given priority in the training for arts and crafts for example. Thus, it seems reassuring that the entity that will ensure the selection of the workers to be trained and then employed by UNESCO operates according to criteria in line with its values. When a training session is finished, the trainees, gathered in an association can access to micro credits from the National micro credit institution.

The training budget foreseen in the “Conservation Action Plan for the Rock Hewn Churches, Lalibela” financed by Norway should be revised because the foreseen salaries for the workers (250 USD per month) are overestimated in comparison with the local wages of civil servants (5000 Birr / 457 USD for a civil servant per month)

## **7. International cooperation projects in Lalibela**

It appeared that studies, and among them the one of the World Bank, already exists on the subject of development at Lalibela, and that different Cooperation institutions have ongoing projects for this site. The Amhara Region, the District of Lasta and the

Municipality of Lalibela have also interesting ongoing projects for the socio-economic development of Lalibela based on tourism development that should be taken into account.

### **7.1 World Bank Project (June 2006)**

The great interest of this study is that it gives a comprehensive overview of tourism in Ethiopia, including statistics and case studies, and identifying its strengths – mainly its cultural and natural assets – and weaknesses – lack of quality infrastructures, of skilled personnel, of the tourist product. The study proposes recommendations and guidelines for an action plan focused on cooperation and consultation between the different players to reach a destination management and a stronger marketing strategy. In this study, tourism is identified as “one of the focal sectors of the five year development plan (PASDEP 2006-2010)” (p. 11); “Culture and history” are identified as the “principal driver of demand” within the leisure segment. The conclusions and recommendations consider Cultural heritage a “key product” and stresses the need to preserve the cultural experience. The mission members have been told that the World Bank should allocate the sum of USD 20 million for the implementation of this Tourism Development Strategy.

Considering the importance of cultural heritage as a strategic asset for tourism development in Ethiopia described in this document, it seems paradoxical that the parts tackling heritage preservation and strategic partnership with UNESCO are found only in the annexes to the study. UNESCO is not mentioned among the list of the main players in the tourism strategy, and the outline action plan does not address cultural heritage preservation, appropriate tourism management at most visited sites, and the related capacity building needs.

The preservation of the natural and cultural assets of Ethiopia and of the World Heritage sites values, their, authenticity and integrity would need to play a more central role in any sustainable tourism strategy. Such an approach would strengthen the objectives of making Ethiopia one of the top ten African tourist destinations and reducing poverty through tourism”.

### **7.2 Ethiopian Ecotourism Development Programme, USAID (2007)**

The USAID Ecotourism Development Programme is an important initiative by USAID currently under study. The project proposal was recently discussed with the UNESCO WHC Tourism Programme Specialists through a conference call, to coordinate activities and seek the WHC input in the project.

### **7.3 European Union funded Interpretation Centre and Handicrafts House**

The on-going EU funded shelters project also foresees the construction of an interpretation centre for the site and a handicraft house to be built and completed before the end of December 2007.

More details about the contents of this project will be sought in the next UNESCO missions.

### **7.4 UNESCO Culture Sector Handicrafts Programme**

In the field of handicrafts, UNESCO has launched a training programme of capacity building in weaving and leather painting which is the second step of a programme launched in 2004 with the Japanese Fund in Trust.

The main objective of the programme is to upgrade the quality and variety of handicrafts and also to improve the creativity of the craftsmen and craftswomen through external artistic stimulation. Another objective is to increase the handicrafts production at Lalibela, considering that the majority of products come from Addis Ababa.

Currently, UNESCO is restoring a traditional house (see opposite picture)



in the Lalibela Town and will use it as a venue for the Fenegetebib Handicraft producers Association to which creation the UNESCO experts contributed.

UNESCO's role would gain at being reinforced in the planned and on-going tourism initiatives by the UN and other international cooperation agencies, since all of these projects naturally involve World Heritage sites.

As a consequence, the WHC may explicitly express the wish to cooperate with the other players in the concerned field and play a role, together with ARCCH, in the conception and implementation of activities in tourism at cultural and natural World Heritage sites.

In this respect, the Director of the UNESCO Addis Ababa Office may wish to reinforce UNESCO WHC's role in the framework of the One UN reform and propose to consider UNESCO as leading Agency for conservation and tourism activities at World Heritage sites in Ethiopia.

## **8. Follow-up on the World Heritage Committee Decision: Monitoring of the European Union funded Temporary Shelters' over Five Churches in Lalibela**

The World Heritage Committee at its 31<sup>st</sup> session (July 2007, Christchurch) has requested an ICOMOS/WHC monitoring mission before the next Committee meeting, to monitor the shelters' project.



View of the shelters construction work site showing Biet Mariam

The mission inspected the work in progress and met with the Supervision and Construction Company team.

Mr. Jara expressed his worry about the ability of the firm to respect delays, the deadline for the works being 31 December 2007.

The situation on the ground has changed only slightly since the UNESCO WHC-ICOMOS of March 2007. Most of all, the old shelters have been removed from Biet Aba Libanos, Biet Mariam, Biet Meskel and Biet Amanuel, and have been replaced in the last three by temporary scaffoldings that will be used to build the horizontal mesh. The mesh and its supporting columns are on their way from Italy and should be mounted in October and November 2007.

The last church to be covered will be Biet Medhane Alem.



View of the scaffoldings at Biet Amanuel

All the works undertaken so far have been done manually, according to the risk mitigation measures requested by the World Heritage Committee (Vilnius, 2006). Nevertheless, one change is to be noted and closely followed-up: in the vicinity of Biet Amanuel, a road was enlarged to allow the use of a mobile crane.

The mission was assured by that the crane was necessary to bring in the big and heavy column elements, and that it would not enter the World Heritage Site but only deposit these elements at the top of the rock surrounding Biet Amanuel. It was also communicated that the Construction Company contract stipulates that the road would not be paved and that it should be brought back to its original width after the works.



View of the Scaffoldings at Biet Mariam



The transformation of an existing path into a large road near Biet Amanuel

These reassurances seem to be enough for now, but a very close monitoring is to be done in order to avoid any risk of dropping heavy elements on the Biet Amanuel on one hand, or changing the landscape and the traffic around the site, on the other.



## 9. Follow-up actions

- The Site Management Committee should submit officially to the World Heritage Committee a map of the site limits, and buffer zone, since such a map did not exist in the nomination files.
- As requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 31st session, the State Party should submit a statement of Outstanding Universal Value. This statement should be completed before the next ICOMOS-WHC monitoring mission takes place in Lalibela.
- The WHC will organize in collaboration with the stakeholders in Lalibela a community related event to explain and discuss the project with the Lalibela inhabitants, and to raise awareness on the site management needs and planning.
- Further WHC studies will start by collecting all national and international development related initiatives in Lalibela, and study the local, regional and national administrative systems affecting site management, tourism and local development.
- Foreseen Economic Development expertise to produce a Public Use Management Plan.
- WHC will take further initiatives to create partnership with local associations and NGOs and the civil society in general.
- Tourism related activities to be planned and coordinated with the WHC initiatives at the Simien Park and other natural sites in Ethiopia.

Cours langue

Budget

Fissahe

Trasposto

Vitto

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<sup>3</sup> Such a map should be topographic or cadastral, have a title and legend in English, the mention “Boundaries of the World Heritage site” and “Buffer Zone of the World Heritage site”, geographical coordinates, a bar scale, in 2 copies and one electronic version.

## **10. Aksum World Heritage Site Improvement Project: The re-erection works of the Obelisk**

### **10.1 Background**

This Project is implemented in the framework of the Italy UNESCO Funds in Trust Cooperation. It was initiated soon after Italy dismantled the Obelisk in Rome and returned to its original site in Aksum (April 2005). The Project achieved its first phase with the Engineering Project and the preparatory studies (Environmental Impact Assessment, Remote Sensing Investigations, landscaping project).

Due to administrative reasons, this project had been delayed for several months. Immediately after the award of the Works contract, a UNESCO mission headed by DIR/WHC was conducted from 23 to 25 July 2007 to officially launch the Aksum Obelisk Re-erection works and to discuss with the Ethiopian officials the implementation programme and the respective roles and obligations<sup>4</sup>.

The project success and timely implementation strongly depends on the swift resolution of administrative procedures, in particular work permits, exemption from VAT, local taxes and custom clearance, and the availability of two 40 tons mobile cranes. These issues were formalized in an agreement signed between UNESCO and the Ethiopian Ministry of Culture on 24 July 2007.

The Ethiopian authorities are keen on inaugurating the reinstalled Obelisk before the end of the Millennium Celebrations (11 September 2008) and have invited the UNESCO DG at this occasion. A date for this inauguration is currently being set. It is to be noted that the Obelisk should be erected in September 2008 but full restoration of its surfaces and the dismantlement of the scaffoldings will not take place before the end of December 2008.

The **Aksum World Heritage Site Improvement Project** also includes training for tourist guides, a site management workshop, a communication campaign and a final publication.

### **10.2 Progress in the implementation of the works**

The Construction Company's sub-contractor Elmi was in charge of receiving the UNESCO mission. Mr. Fisseha Zibelo, Director of the Tigray Office for Culture and Tourism accompanied the mission.

The field visit allowed to note that the mobilization phase is being achieved (the fencing of the site, the construction of the site offices). Nevertheless, the quality of the offices and the materials used for their construction (corrugated sheets) were judged to be of insufficient quality; this information was immediately communicated to the Supervision team for action.

The works achieved also included a ramp for the access of small machinery to the foundation pit. UNESCO signaled to the Contractor that the location of the ramp should not be that of the risk area (presence of eventual cavities) identified by the remote sensing investigation (Annex 6 to the Works Contract).

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<sup>4</sup> The contract for Technical Supervision and Structural Monitoring was also awarded on 23 July 2007. Both Contractors are now operational on the field.



Aksum Construction site: general view

A sample of an embankment gabion was completed. Its quality did not seem sufficient; the Supervision was informed of the necessity to orient the Construction Company on improving it



Sample of gabion for the construction of the temporary embankment

The mission noted the presence of very young workers and asked to immediately remedy to this situation, child labour being strictly forbidden in the contract's general conditions.

Concerning the administrative procedures for tax and VAT exemptions, the mission met with Mr. Jara, Director General of the Authority for Research and Cultural Heritage upon arrival to Addis Ababa. A month after the agreement was signed very little progress has been achieved from the Ethiopian side: the Minister of Finance did not sign the authorizations; instead, Mr. Jara informed the mission while on the field that a change in the procedures has to be made: the Minister would grant one and only permit for all contracts (Construction and Monitoring), instead of doing it gradually as originally foreseen. Therefore the process had to be started all over again and the previous UNESCO letters were not taken into consideration.

The mission immediately informed the Works and Supervision teams of this new procedure and asked them to prepare this exhaustive list.

Concerning the availability of the two mobile cranes, Mr. Jara informed the mission that the Ethiopian Government has given its approval for the use of the cranes free of charge. The mission asked him to formalize the handing over of the cranes for obvious responsibility and insurance issues, and gave Mr. Jara a proposal for a Handing over Agreement. The agreement foresees the Lattanzi establishes a list of maintenance needs.

Lattanzi's works is currently slowed down in waiting for the tax, VAT and custom documents. Due to this situation, the foundation materials are not purchased yet (cement and iron), and the materials to be imported for the consolidation of Stele 3 cannot be sent from Italy.

ARCCH has to provide UNESCO with the positioning and orientation of Stele 3 and remove the basement stone from the site, as well as supervise the foundation pit excavations; none of these tasks that are part of Ethiopia's responsibility<sup>5</sup> have been done yet.

It is very unlikely in the current situation (long administrative delays, unclear solution for the cranes handing over) to envisage shortening the works timetable, as requested by the Ethiopian authorities in July 2007.

### **10.3 Training activities foreseen in the framework of the Project**

The training in Site Management was discussed with Mr. Zibelo and Mr. Jara. It was decided to schedule it in March 2008. Mr. Jara and Mr. Zibelo agreed on using the services of Mr. George Abungu as an eventual tutor for this workshop. Mr. Abungu had previously conducted for UNESCO an assessment of the site management needs in the framework of the Aksum Project.

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<sup>5</sup> These tasks were agreed upon in the tripartite agreement between the ARCCH, Italy and UNESCO.

The training of Tourism Guides shall be organized outside the tourism peak season.

The above training activities will be linked to the Lalibela project through modalities to be established.

#### **10.4 Communication Campaign in Ethiopia**

The Communication campaign initiated in Ethiopia two years ago by the UNESCO ADI Office was briefly discussed with Mr. Satti (DIR/ADI) and Fumiko Ohinata. Banners identical to those already displayed announcing the return of the Obelisk have been printed and should be displayed again. A revision of the Communication Campaign needs to be done as soon as possible to optimize the use of the remaining funds. Mr. Satti asked for a one page proposal to re-orient the Campaign. It was also agreed that WHC would prepare the TOR for the ARCCH coordinator.

#### **10.5 Employment of an ARCCH Administrative Coordinator**

During the mission, Mr. Jara nominated Mr. Kasafun as project coordinator to follow-up on the administrative and logistical matters.

#### **10.6 World Bank Project in Aksum: the Site Museum**

In January 2006, a UNESCO mission visited the work site of the World Bank funded site museum, met with the project members and was shown a model and drawings of the Museum. At that time, reservations were expressed on the choice of the Museum's location immediately at the entrance of the site, and a recommendation to use thatched roofs was made.



General view of the Aksum site museum (World Bank Project) in relation with the Stelae field

The construction works of the Museum are over now, although the Museum is not finished. Unexpectedly, one of the entrance towers was raised to two floors making it very visible from the site's entrance. The materials used are very poor and the roofs are made of corrugated sheets.

The traditional building beside the Museum was restored but the works were also not completed because of the administrative closure of the project. Some parts need maintenance already because of water run off.

The World Bank Project included a tourism and site interpretation component (signposts and visiting circuits) that was not implemented, apparently due to project delays. Only ventilation and rain protection elements were installed at openings above the underground galleries (see picture) as part of the site interpretation project; their aesthetic qualities and integration in the sit are questionable.

The Ethiopian central and regional authorities expressed their dissatisfaction with the World Bank Project and their frustration due to a lack of consultation with them on the project choices.

It is to be noted that UNESCO Addis Ababa has done an evaluation study of the World Bank project in Aksum and Gondar, at the request of the World Bank.



Interior view of the Aksum Site Museum



Ventilation/protection elements for the underground galleries (World Bank Project)

## 10.7 Follow-up actions

- Write to the Supervision and Works Contractors about the new exemption procedures
- Transmit by letter to the Ethiopian Authorities the full list of equipment and materials to be purchased from or send to Ethiopia in the framework of the project
- Transmit by letter the Cranes Agreement to the Ethiopian Authorities and organize the technical visit for the Lattanzi cranes technicians
- Ask Lattanzi for a financial proposal to remove the basement stone
- Follow-up with the ARCCH the issue of the Obelisk positioning and orientation.
- Set-up the celebration ceremony date of the works
- Organize the Site Management Workshop
- Organize the Training for Tourism guides
- Send UNESCO ADI a proposal for terms of reference of the ARCCH coordinator.
- Send UNESCO ADI a proposal for the revision of the Communication Campaign activities
- Draft a project proposal for a Heritage in Young Hands Workshop in coordination with WHC/PACT and the Education Sector/ Associated schools (project ideas approved by DIR/ADI, Mr. Jara and Mr. Zibelo).
- The Ethiopian Authorities to submit a map of the site limits and buffer zone including a request for site extension (upon completion of the training course in site management)
- As requested by the World Heritage Committee at its 31st session, the State Party should submit a statement of Outstanding Universal Value. This statement should be completed before the next ICOMOS-WHC monitoring mission takes place in Aksum in 2009.

## **Annex 1, Persons met**

### **Addis Ababa**

Mr Jara Haile Mariam, Director General, Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH)

Mr. Mr. Getu Assefa, Head of the ARCCH Conservation Department  
[getuassefa@gmail.com](mailto:getuassefa@gmail.com), Mo. +251 (0) 911 416072.

Ms S. Barnes Country Director, UNDP

Mr Takele Teshome, Programme, UNDP, Analyst for Food Security and Recovery.

Mr. Tesfaye Desalegne Biwota, Head of Tourism, Marketing and Promotion Department, Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Mr Kejela Gemtessa, Development Specialist, Head of a Consultancy Company

### **Aksum**

Fisseha Zibel, Director, Aksum Office for Culture and Tourism

Emilio Ibi, Director of Work Site, Elmi Construction Firm

Shamber Yimer, Building Engineer, Elmi Construction Firm

### **Lalibela Stakeholders Meeting**

Ato Tesfaye Getie, Head of the Lasta Woreda Administration

Abba Gebre Iyesus, Head of the Lalibela Church Administration

Ato Habtamu Tesfaw, Head a.i. of the Lasta District Culture and Tourism Department (LTCO)

Mo. +251 (0) 912 068633

Replacing Mr. Belete Wodaje (Mo. + 251 (0)911 805163

Ato Genenew Wondie, Community Representative

Basha Lammo Cheakol, Community Representative

Ato Abebe Mengistu, Tour and Travel Expert (LCTO)

[Abebe-mengistu@yahoo.com](mailto:Abebe-mengistu@yahoo.com)

Ato Melak Abeben, Lalibela Town Municipality (acting Mayor)

Mo. + 251 (0) 911 042486

Office: + 251 (0) 33 3360016

Dessale Bithanu, Lalibela Town Municipality



## **Annex 2, Programme of the visit**

- 14 December Departure from Paris (6.50 am)  
Arrival to Addis at 8.30 am
- 15 December Departure to Axum at 8.30 am. Arrival at 1 pm (flight delay)  
Afternoon: Field visit of site with the construction and supervision teams and the Site Manager Mr. Fisseha Zibelo.  
Official visit with the President of the Tigray Region, The ARCCH Director and the UNESCO Addis Director.  
Meeting with the Construction team representative, Alessandro Cristini.
- 16 December Meeting with Fisseha Zibelo  
Departure to Lalibela at 11.40 am  
Afternoon: Meeting with Rafael Matos, Negussie Simie and Abebe Mengistu
- 17 December Morning: Meeting and field visit with Debora Giorgi and Mezimer Abiy and inspection of the shelters  
Afternoon: Meeting with the stakeholders in presence of the four UNESCO experts  
Dinner with the Head of the Lasta District Tourism and Culture Office
- 18 December Morning: De-briefing and programming with Debora Giorgi and Mezimer Abiy  
11 am: departure to the airport. Return to Addis Ababa (arrival at 6 pm)  
Dinner with Hirut Girma and Rafael Matos
- 19 December Morning: meeting with Andrea Senatore and the Italian Ambassador  
Meeting with Mr Jara, Mr Kasahun and Mr Simie at the ARCCH  
Meeting with Hirut Girma and Rafael Matos  
Meeting and lunch with Georges Dubois and Rafael Matos  
Afternoon: Meeting with the French Cultural Centre  
Evening: departure to Paris (flight at 11.55 pm)
- 20 December Arrival to Paris at 5.45 am