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## WORLD HERITAGE NOMINATION - IUCN TECHNICAL EVALUATION

### VIÑALES VALLEY (CUBA)

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#### Field Mission:

While the IUCN and ICOMOS experts were in Cuba over the same period, because of other commitments it was not possible to undertake a joint inspection. While they had some discussions in Havana, IUCN is not currently aware of the position ICOMOS is taking on this nomination.

#### IUCN role:

Essentially this is to contribute to ICOMOS comments on aspects of para. 38 of the Operational Guidelines particularly relating to the extent to which *"the existence of traditional forms of land-use supports biological diversity..."* and responding to the statement in the Operational Guidelines that *"The protection of traditional cultural landscapes is therefore helpful in maintaining biological diversity."*

**Consultations:** In addition to a field mission by Jim Barborak in 1999 during which national and local officials were consulted, IUCN has also consulted with six reviewers.

#### IUCN assessment:

IUCN considers that the area does not possess any significant biological diversity values in terms of Para. 38. The area has for centuries been a centre of tobacco production with techniques ranging from traditional cropping mechanisms to modern high-tech tobacco growing. In the course of this long history of cultivation, there have been no significant side benefits for biodiversity conservation.

As an IUCN commentator reported "At Vinales, it is the combination of valley agriculture with the stunning backdrop of the vertically sided karst hills that is memorable" rather than biodiversity values. Nevertheless, the valley's forests do support 17 endemic species and this does add a valuable biodiversity component to the site.

Commenting on the area's tower karst landscape, an IUCN reviewer pointed out that there are many locations in the world with similar karst landforms such as Ha Long Bay WH site (Vietnam) and that on these grounds the site would not measure up as an example of a karst landscape of world significance.

The 1996 IUCN Technical Evaluation tabled when the World Heritage Bureau decided in 1997 that the Vinales Valley did not meet the criteria for a natural site summarised a range of natural values including flora typical of western Cuba and wildlife and birds and an extensive cave system as well as some ammonite fossils. As indicated, the Bureau did not consider these values merited inscription of the site for its natural values.

#### Management issues:

In addition, IUCN notes the absence of a strong, unified, institutional framework for managing visual aspects and land use in the valley. For example, while a national park has been proposed for the

valley, it had not been gazetted at the time of the field mission and, in any case, its proposed boundaries differ for the boundaries of the site as nominated. By comparison, the area of Old Havana has a very effective zoning and building supervision agency with taxing powers which has provided both the teeth and the funds needed to tackle the restoration of the outstanding cultural values in that World Heritage site.

#### **IUCN Summary:**

As indicated, this is a visually exciting place and, should ICOMOS decide to recommend inscription under Cultural criteria, then there are some natural values which would be complementary to the cultural values of the site such as the tower karst and cave system as well as the valley's forest ecosystem with a high level of endemism. However, as has already been determined by the WH Bureau in 1987, the valley is not considered to meet the Natural criteria for a WH inscription. However, if the site is considered by ICOMOS to have the requisite qualities of a cultural landscape, IUCN considers that there is a need to significantly strengthen management aspects to ensure that those qualities are maintained and negative aspects are remedied under both an appropriate legal status and an effective management regime. Future management should also encourage effective input from natural resource specialists to ensure the valley's natural values are maintained or enhanced.

#### **Recommendation from the twenty-third ordinary session of the Bureau: July, 1999.**

At its twenty-third ordinary session the Bureau recommended that the nomination be *referred back* to the State Party to enable it to provide additional information for review by ICOMOS. If this information would be provided before 1 October 1999, a revised evaluation and recommendation could be presented by ICOMOS to the twenty-third extraordinary session of the Bureau.