

Nakhon Phanom Statement

on World Heritage of Religious Interest.

International consultative workshop on the conservation and management of the World Heritage of religious interest in Asia-Pacific

17 – 19 May, 2017

Bangkok and Nakhon Phanom Province

We, the participants from twelve States Parties, namely Kingdom of Bhutan, People's Republic of China, Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Republic of India, Republic of Indonesia, Republic of the Union of Myanmar, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, Republic of the Philippines, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri-Lanka, Kingdom of Thailand and Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, UNESCO and ICOMOS PRERICO, attending the International Consultation Workshop on World Heritage of Religious Interest for Asia and Pacific, held in Bangkok and Nakhon Phanom Province, Thailand, from 17-19 May, 2017, thank the Thai government and UNESCO for providing this opportunity to the representatives of the States Parties, World Heritage site managers, international resource persons, and international and national researchers, to meet, consult, and widely share experiences on this important topic on the conservation and management of the World Heritage of religious interest in Asia-Pacific. We appreciate Nakhon Phanom University and Phra That Phanom Temple as well as Sanka community for hosting part of the meeting and field activities.

We consider that a large number of the World Heritage properties worldwide, and especially in Asia and Pacific, are in the category of properties with associated sacred and spiritual values.

We also consider that protection, conservation, presentation, and sustainable management of the World Heritage of religious interest can contribute positively to the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, and to the "International Decade for Rapprochement of Cultures" (2013-2022).

We further recognize that many of these World Heritage properties, though ancient in terms of origin and history, have been continuously safeguarded and used by communities, while maintaining the original location, form, function and spirit, in order to continue to serve as spiritual sanctuaries for contemporary societies.

We recall with appreciation the Decisions taken by the World Heritage Committee at many past Sessions on the UNESCO Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest. We also appreciate the cycle of Thematic Consultations on this Initiative organized in the past decades by UNESCO, ICCROM, ICOMOS, IUCN, UNWTO and many other agencies, the outcome documents of which have informed our consultation in Asia and Pacific.

We build upon the recommendations adopted at the previous consultation meetings and the principles defined.

We recommend that during the process of preparation or revision of the Tentative Lists and the preparation of nomination dossiers, due attention should be placed on the identification within the relevant cultural context of all attributes, justifying the Outstanding Universal Value, including those justifying the associative spiritual and sacred values of the property. In this regards, the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies should provide advisory assistance as part of upstream process when formally requested by the State Party in conformity with the Operational Guidelines (paragraph 28, (f)2).

We recommend that the general guidance on conservation and management of the World Heritage of religious interest also include the principles, as follows:

1. Emphasis should be placed on the significance of identifying attributes and testimonies of physical and spiritual values of religious properties and sacred sites;
2. Understanding and mutual respect to all cultures must be considered so that spiritual nature of properties could be judged primarily within the cultural context to which they belong (paragraph 81 of the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention);
3. Scientific conservation, restoration, and sustainable management of this particular type of cultural and natural heritage must be promoted with respect for continuity of existing religious traditions and use;
4. Disaster risk management, including risk reduction, emergency preparedness, disaster response, recovery ,and rehabilitation, should be integrated into the overall management for WH properties of religious interest in the region;
5. Understanding of contextual values should be reinforced and enhanced to facilitate and revive living religious practices in order to ensure continuity of the living function which is a core value of properties of religious interest. We also suggest that guidance include examples of best practices;
6. Special consideration must be paid to careful management of pilgrims and visitors to sacred places.
7. Taking into account specific circumstances of the Asia-Pacific region, special attention should, in property management plans, be paid to defining guidance for possible reconstruction of WH properties of religious interest, including in particular:
 - i. in the context of destruction due to natural disasters, reconstruction may be accepted, in conformity with the 2000 Riga Charter;
 - ii. in the context of cultural practices associated with merit-making, which is central to religious practices of many belief systems of the region, importance of recognizing that renovation as a traditional act of merit-making with the focus on continuity of the living function but sustaining the spirit and feeling of the sacred space by embracing ‘change’ as part of the continuity.

8. The participation of the religious communities in the management of the properties of religious interest should be encouraged.

We therefore call on UNESCO, the World Heritage Committee, all the Advisory Bodies, the World Heritage Centre, and the States Parties to the World Heritage Convention:

- to support the UNESCO Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest; and
- to assist the States Parties in the Asia-Pacific region in their efforts to protect, conserve, communicate the values, and sustainably manage their World Heritage properties of religious interest.

Adopted on the 19th May, 2017, at Phra That Phanom Temple, That Phanom District, Nakhon Phanom Province, Thailand.
