
Asmara (Eritrea) No 1550

Official name as proposed by the State Party

Asmara: Africa's Modernist City

Location

Central Region Administration
Eritrea

Brief description

Asmara, located on a plateau at the centre of the country, is the capital city of Eritrea. The nominated property encompasses the area of the city that resulted from subsequent phases of planning between 1893 and 1941, developed during the Italian colonial occupation. The property includes the urban layout of the city, which emerged from the different plans based mainly on an orthogonal grid but incorporating elements of a radial system, and a large number of buildings designed in the early modernist and rationalist architectural language of the fascist era. It also includes the indigenous unplanned neighbourhoods of Arbata Asmera and Abbashawel.

Category of property

In terms of categories of cultural property set out in Article I of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a *group of buildings* and it is also a *new town of the 20th century* according to Annex 3 of the *Operational Guidelines*.

1 Basic data

Included in the Tentative List

25 March 2005

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the Nomination

A request for 30,000 USD to complete the Conservation Master Plan and its regulations was approved in 2016 and funds have been allocated by the World Heritage Fund.

Date received by the World Heritage Centre

1 February 2016

Background

This is a new nomination.

Consultations

ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage, on Historic Towns and Villages, and several independent experts.

Technical Evaluation Mission

An ICOMOS technical evaluation mission visited the nominated property from 23 to 31 July 2016.

Additional information received by ICOMOS

ICOMOS sent a letter to the State Party on 13 October 2016 requesting additional information on the following points: provide additional arguments to justify criterion (ii); better explain the rationale for the delineation of the boundaries; and the current status of protection and management.

The State Party responded on 14 November 2016 and the information provided is integrated in the relevant sections of this report.

Following the meeting of the ICOMOS Panel in November 2016, an Interim Report was sent on 20 December 2016 to the State Party, seeking further information on the following aspects: construction techniques and morphologies to support the justification of criterion (ii); detailing of the attributes expressing the proposed Outstanding Universal Value; expanding the comparative analysis to the wider African context; the boundaries of the nominated property; measures and mechanisms to sustain the rehabilitation of the city; the hierarchy, provisions and validity of the existing planning instruments and their relationship with the management system/plan for the nominated property; and the involvement of the local communities.

The State Party responded on 28 February 2017 providing substantial additional information, which has been integrated into the relevant sections of this report.

2 The property

Description

The property nominated includes the Historic Perimeter of Asmara which emerged from the successive planning phases from 1893 until 1941, when the town passed under British military administration, during World War II. It also includes the pre-existing settlement of Arbata Asmera and the indigenous quarter of Abbashawel.

Asmara developed from the 1890's onwards as a military outpost for the Italian colonial power, thanks to its strategic location at the centre of the colony. But it was soon to have better prospects: due to its fortunate geographical position, at 2,323m a.s.l., it enjoys a temperate climate and was free from malaria. Italians living in Eritrea subsequently preferred to reside in Asmara rather than in Massawa.

The early settlement – the Campo Cintato – originated thanks to the building of Fort Baldissera. The position of the Campo Cintato with respect to the main route coming from Massawa and crossing the Asmara upland, to Fort Baldissera and Arbata Asmera, determined a polarity and an axis at the territorial scale that was confirmed in all subsequent development plans. The first plan of

development dates back to 1902, although until 1908 most of the interventions in Asmara focussed on providing necessary infrastructure.

The first phase of growth of the city occurred east of the Campo Cintato up to the Mai Bela stream. The early nucleus of the residential and tertiary services' expansion developed on a grid layout which, organized around the market square, integrated the elements of the local landscape - the hills, rocks, the river, and the existing settlement. The early military settlement also included a residential area for conscripted Eritreans who served in the Italian Army (known as *askari*) which used the local residential models of the *hidmo* (a square-plan-based dwelling) and of the *agdo* (a circular-plan-based dwelling).

The grid layout was delimited by two main parallel arterial streets: the Corso del Re (King's Avenue, today's Nakfa Street) and Via Regina (Queen's Boulevard). On Corso del Re, which followed the same direction as the caravan route, a wide square – Piazza del Tribunale, later Piazza Roma – opened up: it functioned as the heart of city life. A garden with palm trees and a fountain adorned the square and buildings symbolic of the colonial power, such as the courthouse and the bank headquarters, overlooked it. Behind the courthouse, a smaller square with the post office was created.

The first organic plan for Asmara was issued in 1908, when its growth came to be regulated for the first time by an urban layout based on four zones, in conformity with ethnic segregation and functional programmes. The plan envisaged the European zone, the mixed zone, the indigenous zone and a suburban, mainly industrial, zone. The mixed zone corresponded to that of the market, eastward of the Campo Cintato, while the indigenous zone was located around the indigenous settlement. The industrial area was located at the periphery.

With the city growing, a new plan was necessary. Odoardo Cavagnari was appointed to draw it up and the new Plan was ready in 1913. It confirmed the racial segregation of the previous plan and its orthogonal grid by adding two new East-West axes at the edge of the previous expansion: Corso Italia (today's Harnet Avenue) to the south, which superseded Corso del Re (today's Nakfa Street) as the focus of the urban development; and Viale Manzoni (today's Afalet Avenue) to the north. In the fascist decades, some of the most important buildings that gave Asmara its rationalist appearance grew up along these streets. Radiating from their furthest ends and taking into account the uneven geography of the plain, a system of diagonal streets was developed to expand the city and to locate the new allotments. The rigidity of the grid therefore came to a halt in the layout of three grand goose-feet, located at the corners of the triangle containing the early core of Asmara. With the increase in the number of inhabitants between the 1920's and the mid 1930's, the entire periphery of the city to the south-east, south-west and north-west came to assume the appearance of a large new residential quarter made up of two- or three-storey houses.

The time was ripe for a new plan of expansion and in 1936 Vittorio Cafiero was charged with the task of developing a new regulatory plan for Asmara. His plan, completed in 1938, and accompanied by regulations still in existence today, focused on the reinforcement of the central axis between the Governor's Palace and the new railway station – thus shifting the representative areas of the town to the south – and the selective demolition of the oldest area. Cafiero conceived a new large indigenous quarter north of Abbashawel, which was intended to be transformed into a green belt. The plan should have been developed starting from the indigenous area while at the same time elaborating a detailed plan for the most representative parts of the city, such as those around the railway station and the old Governor's Palace. Cafiero integrated the previous street pattern conceived by Cavagnari into the new plan through a bypass, which linked the new residential quarters to the existing city.

Before 1935, the architectural character of the buildings erected in Asmara was mainly eclectic in nature and many areas still retain their eclectic appearance. It was only after 1935, with the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, that Asmara underwent a large scale programme of construction following the Italian rationalist idiom of the time: governmental and other administrative edifices, residential and commercial buildings, churches, mosques, synagogues, cinemas, hotels and restaurants, factories and service stations, and sport facilities, were erected following the most up-to-date design forms, in an expression of architectural experimentation and creativity that could be expressed in a freer manner than in the homeland, where architects were more directly subjected to ideological control.

Designed by Italian architects or engineers, the urban form of Asmara followed the models for colonial planned cities, although the natural features of the environment and the pre-existing settlements were largely integrated into the urban layout, thereby giving rise to a peculiar urban environment.

ICOMOS has requested additional information on the building techniques, materials and forms that were used in the construction of the town and its buildings.

The State Party responded in February 2017, expanding substantially on what is presented in the nomination dossier and the additional information provided in November 2016 on the use of local materials and techniques, and the use of traditional construction methods in buildings.

Relying on the indigenous workforce and as a result of specific interests of rationalist architects in traditional forms and techniques, elements of local construction idioms and techniques were used to construct a number of buildings, which, although exhibiting rationalist forms, thanks to the local workforce make use of local workmanship, materials and techniques.

The additional information documents very well through many illustrations the range of materials and techniques used to build the architecture of Asmara and also the role played by Eritreans in the construction of Asmara as a skilled and semi-skilled workforce.

History and development

When the Italian colonial process began in 1890, the existing settlement was no more than a large village; at the time the population would not have exceeded a few thousand.

The first governmental decree aiming to give the centre of Asmara urban stature dates back to 1898. The relocation of the capital from Massawa to Asmara triggered architectural, infrastructural, and urban interventions, as well as public regulations and ordinary maintenance. In 1903, the first secular elementary school was inaugurated, and the market area near the Mosque was equipped with services and facilities, as well as the construction of the Governor's Palace, the opening of a few roads, and tree planting. The 1902 plan was not implemented and was superseded by another one in 1908. The growth of the town required a new plan, outlined by Cavagnari in 1913 and subsequently amended in 1916. In the 1920's, Asmara was a small town of no more than 18,000 inhabitants. However, by 1936 it had grown to 98,000, of which 53,000 were Italians, based in the area close to the older core, at the time occupied by military barracks.

The new 1938 plan of Cafiero designed the expansion of the city and integrated the eclectic city that had developed since the early 1900's. Within a five-year timespan, between 1935 – when preparations for the war against Ethiopia began – and April 1941 – when Italy lost Eritrea to the British army – Asmara saw a dramatic increase in population and underwent an unprecedented urban development.

While strict regulations applied for the European and mixed quarters, the indigenous neighbourhood was not provided with adequate services and soon became overcrowded and continued to suffer from the lack of basic infrastructure.

The city changed little during the British presence and, subsequently, under Ethiopian rule, although a few public buildings, the American military base, and an unfinished stadium were built.

Despite decades of civil war, Asmara suffered no significant damage, apart from neglect. The first threats to the integrity of the city were caused by new development, following independence. A few high-rise buildings and other examples of inappropriate development led the Eritrean and Asmara authorities to issue a moratorium for new construction, which has been in place since 2001.

In 1997, the Government of Eritrea, with the support of the World Bank, initiated the Cultural Assets Rehabilitation Project, with a mandate to document and preserve the

character of Asmara, an initiative that continues today with the Asmara Heritage Project.

3 Justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity

Comparative analysis

The comparison considers the national and the sub-regional context, focusing mainly on eastern Africa and essentially on Italian planned colonial cities, such as Addis Ababa, Gondar, and Harar (Ethiopia); Mogadishu (Somalia); Tripoli (Libya), Tirana (Albania) or Sabaudia (Italy). The examples drawn from the international context include Tel Aviv (White City of Tel-Aviv – the Modern Movement, Israel, 2003, (ii) and (iv)), Casablanca (Tentative List of Morocco), Rabat (Rabat, Modern Capital and Historic City: a Shared Heritage, Morocco, 2012, (ii) and (iv)), Changchun, Dalian (China), Canberra (Australia) and New Delhi (Tentative List of India). The State Party concludes that the closest comparators for Asmara could be considered Canberra and New Delhi and to a certain extent Changchun. The nomination dossier concludes that Asmara stands out for the combination and completeness of its innovative urban planning and modernist architecture as emerged in an African context. However, the real exceptionality of Asmara resides in its integrity as an early modernist planned city.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis has been limited only to the eastern African context and has not examined relevant examples of other colonial cities in Africa, nor has it demonstrated why these would not be relevant for the analysis. The comparison seems to be too much focused on Italian Modernism and planned towns, either in Italy or in the Colonies during the Fascist period, and overlooks other examples. An expansion of the comparative analysis within the African region is certainly needed to demonstrate the merits of Asmara.

ICOMOS in its Interim Report requested the State Party to expand the comparative analysis with other colonial planned cities in Africa. The State Party responded in February 2017 by providing a substantially expanded comparative analysis that examines a further 14 cities throughout Africa: Accra (Forts and Castles, Volta, Greater Accra, Central and Western Regions, 1979, criterion (vi)), Ghana; Antananarivo, Madagascar; Brazzaville, Republic of Congo; Dakar, Senegal; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; Djibouti; Harare, Zimbabwe; Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo; Lagos, Nigeria; Malabo, Equatorial Guinea; Maputo, Mozambique; Nairobi, Kenya; Pretoria, South Africa; Windhoek, Namibia.

The expanded comparative analysis does not draw explicit conclusions, although ICOMOS observes that Asmara exhibits only some similarities with the selected comparators but also remarkable differences related mainly to the relatively short period of colonial occupation, planning, and construction of the city as an almost

completely new town. In other cases, either the colonial occupation was much longer and is reflected in different urban development phases, or the post-colonial development modified the aspect of the colonial planned city, in some cases to a great extent, whilst in Asmara this did not happen and the quality of the urban and built fabric of the planned city has been retained to an exceptional degree.

ICOMOS concurs with the State Party that the intactness of Asmara in its urban layout, architecture, scale and character is outstanding and almost unique, and needs to be retained.

ICOMOS considers that the comparative analysis justifies consideration of this property for the World Heritage List.

Justification of Outstanding Universal Value

The nominated property is considered by the State Party to be of Outstanding Universal Value as a cultural property for the following reasons:

- Asmara is an outstanding example of a colonial capital bearing witness to an encounter with modernity in the early 20th century and then in a post-colonial situation;
- The historic urban landscape illustrates the unity of innovative urban planning and modernist architecture combined with local conditions, both natural and cultural;
- The urban layout of the town illustrates how planning principles of racial segregation and functional zoning were applied by the Italian colonial power to respond to challenges of modern urban requirements in a highland African setting;
- The architectural character exemplifies a period of intense development and architectural experimentation of the rationalist architectural idiom in an African context.

ICOMOS considers that the way in which the justification for Outstanding Universal Value is phrased raises some problems, which it is useful to address in this report. While ICOMOS acknowledges the importance of the UNESCO recommendation on Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL) as being “an additional tool to integrate policies and practices of conservation of the built environment into the wider goals of urban development in respect of the inherited values and traditions of different cultural contexts”, there is an agreement that the notion of HUL should be seen as a useful approach that can sustain and strengthen management but cannot be understood as a category of heritage and should not be mentioned as such in the justification for inscription.

The arguments altogether bring up issues related to planning and associations. Although the main buildings of the city are well documented in the nomination dossier, there is far less information on the structure of the city and how it might carry complex associations. There are also few details in the nomination dossier on the morphology

of the city or the characteristics of the various discrete areas that have been identified in the research on the town and have been used as a reference to describe the nominated property.

ICOMOS therefore requested the State Party to provide additional information on the overall urban dimension of the nominated property and its character as a planned city in a specific context, and on the related attributes that support the proposed justification for inscription.

In the additional information submitted in February 2017, the State Party argues that the notion of the historic urban landscape is not mentioned in the nomination dossier; however, it should be underlined that it is explicitly referred to in the justification for inscription. The additional information also substantially expanded the description of the attributes related to the urban scale, layout and overall character of Asmara. This is integrated in the relevant section of this report.

ICOMOS concurs with the State Party that the nominated property is an exceptionally well-preserved planned urban ensemble based on an orthogonal grid plan combined with diagonal axes, characterised by a human scale, eclectic and rationalist built forms, well-defined open spaces, and public and private buildings, including cinemas, shops, banks, religious structures, public and private offices, industrial facilities, and residences. Altogether, they outstandingly convey how colonial planning, based on functional and racial segregation principles, was applied and adapted to the local geographical conditions to achieve symbolic messages and functional requirements. The town has come to be associated with the struggle of the Eritrean people for self-determination, which was pursued whilst embracing the tangible, yet exceptional evidence of their colonial past.

Integrity and authenticity

Integrity

According to the nomination dossier, the boundaries of the nominated property comprise all elements necessary to convey the proposed justification for inscription. It also includes the indigenous section of the town (Arbate Asmera and Abbashawel) – area 14 in the nomination dossier – which was incorporated into the plans for colonial Asmara, without enjoying a detailed design of its layout but rather illustrating the exclusion and segregation suffered by the indigenous population during the Italian colonial power, particularly from the advent of Fascism.

ICOMOS notes that this part of the city poses extreme challenges in terms of its conservation as a heritage property and the need for its infrastructural rehabilitation and possible decongestion.

On the other hand, the integrity of the buildings and of the city is overall remarkable. They do not suffer from particular development pressures, but rather from lack of

maintenance and neglect, due to the limited resources available in the country.

Buildings retain, in most cases, their original functions. Open spaces and public gardens have recently been undergoing thorough renovation thanks to the engagement of the nearby communities (with planning and supervision by city authorities).

Authenticity

The urban layout of Asmara combines the more traditional orthogonal grid with the radial system, which was being explored in its functional and architectural potential by the emerging discipline of urban planning at the dawn of the 20th century. Asmara's layout, organization and the specific character of the quarters illustrates also the application of zoning for both functional and racial reasons. The early eclectic architectural language was complemented and supplanted by the rationalist idiom of the 1930's buildings that give Asmara its peculiar character.

The property bears credible witness to the specific cultural, political and geographical circumstances in which Asmara's plan and architecture came into being.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the conditions of integrity and authenticity have been met, although sector 14 of the nominated property requires an urgent and defined rehabilitation programme.

Criteria under which inscription is proposed

The property is nominated on the basis of cultural criteria (ii), (iii), and (iv).

Criterion (ii): *exhibit an important interchange of human values, over a span of time or within a cultural area of the world, on developments in architecture or technology, monumental arts, town-planning or landscape design;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that the nominated property bears exceptional witness to a cultural interchange during the early 20th century, illustrated by the innovative urban planning combined with modernist architecture and with local cultural and natural conditions, which created a distinctive urbanism characterized by a human scale.

ICOMOS requested additional information on the rationale for the justification for criterion (ii) in October 2016. The State Party replied explaining that this criterion is justified in two ways: the first relates to the planning phases of the town and its modernist architecture in the early 20th century; the second relates to Eritrea's response to the physical legacies of this urban heritage in the early 21st century in relation to the colonial past. Despite the evidence of its colonial imprint, Asmara has been incorporated into the Eritrean identity and struggle for self-determination and has been the object of early efforts for its protection.

ICOMOS considers that the value interchange in Asmara's urban fabric is less evident than the transposition and materialization of ideas about planning developed in Europe and North America in the multi-confessional African context, which, however, certainly brings in some sort of syncretism. The human scale does not seem to be the result of a conscious effort, but rather the effect of carefully applied architectural forms representative of an urban colonial project.

On the other hand, the involvement in the construction of the town of the local workforce and the use of local techniques and materials and the reference to local building morphologies, can be considered to complement the transposition of colonial models and contribute to reflecting an interchange of human values.

In February 2017, the State Party provided additional information that illustrates the ways in which Eritrean skills, capacities and workforce, as well as local techniques and materials, were used and reinterpreted into the architectural morphologies and constructions.

ICOMOS considers that the additional information contributes to justifying this criterion, although in conjunction with criterion (iv).

ICOMOS also recognizes that the sense of belonging of the Eritrean people to their capital Asmara has largely contributed to its preservation up until today.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

Criterion (iii): *bear a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Asmara bears exceptional testimony to the universal aspiration for and attainment of national self-determination founded on the development of cultural and political consciousness thanks to multiple encounters with regional civilisations and colonial experiences. The town was a centre of established cultural traditions and commercial networks before it came to be a hub of foreign agendas throughout the 20th century and in particular between the 1930's and the end of the Cold War.

ICOMOS believes that these arguments do not fulfil criterion (iii) and are not reflected in any evident manner by the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has not been justified.

Criterion (iv): *be an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates (a) significant stage(s) in human history;*

This criterion is justified by the State Party on the grounds that Asmara is seen as an outstanding example of the

transition in architecture and town planning at the beginning of the 20th century as a response to the encounter with modernity in an African context. The combination of town planning models and architectural idioms encapsulates stages of development of modernity including colonialism, scientific responses to the quest for planning and infrastructure, and rapid technological and urban development.

ICOMOS considers that Asmara's urban layout and character, in combining the orthogonal grid with radial street patterns, integrating topographical features, taking into account local cultural conditions created by different ethnic and religious groups, and using the principle of zoning for achieving racial segregation and functional organisation, bears exceptional witness to the development of the new discipline of urban planning at the beginning of the 20th century and its application in an African context to serve the Italian colonial agenda. This hybrid plan that combined the functional approach of the grid with the search for the picturesque and the creation of scenic spaces, vistas, civic plaza and monumental places, served the functional, civic and symbolic requirements for a colonial capital. The architecture of Asmara complements the plan and forms a coherent whole, although reflecting eclecticism and rationalist idioms, and is one of the most complete and intact collections of modernist/rationalist architecture in the world.

ICOMOS considers that this criterion has been justified.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the nominated property meets criteria (ii) and (iv) and the conditions of authenticity and integrity.

Description of the attributes

The additional information provided by the State Party on attributes of the property is integrated below:

Asmara's urban character and strong urban form exhibits a human scale in the relationship between buildings, streets, open spaces, and related activities adapted to the local conditions, which embodies both colonial and post-colonial African life, with its public spaces, mixed-use fabric and place-based material culture. These spaces and usage patterns also bear witness to interchange and cultural assimilation of successive encounters with different cultures as well as to the associations of Eritreans with Asmara. Asmara's urban layout with its different patterns associated with the planning phases, illustrates the adaptation of modern urban planning and architectural models to local cultural and geographical conditions. The ensembles attest to the colonial power and to the presence of Coptic and Jewish communities in Asmaran society, with their institutional and religious places, the elements of the urban architecture (Harnet et Sematat Avenues; Mai Jah Jah Park; the footpaths; the old plaques with traces of the street names), the buildings, complexes and facilities resulting from the 1930s programmes (the Post Office building at Senegyeti

Avenue), the cinemas (Impero, Roma, Odeon, Capitol, Hamasien), the schools, the sports facilities, the garages, the residential complexes and buildings, the villas, the commercial buildings, the factories (soap and textiles), the cores of the community quarters (e.g. the Italian quarter, the Coptic quarter and the Muslim quarter). The major religious places, marking the landscape with bell-towers, towers, and minarets, and civil and military cemeteries, illustrate the diversity of the populations and of their rituals. The main trade route was also incorporated into the plan; the administrative area with ministerial buildings and the Governor's palace, the public markets, the service stations.

4 Factors affecting the property

The nomination dossier reports that the town suffers from pressure from development and the need for housing. The moratorium on new construction has, so far, preserved the city but solutions should be found in order to allow for urban rehabilitation of abandoned or under-developed areas within the city.

Pollution from poorly-located industries may threaten the attributes of the nominated property; and the lack of waste management and liquid waste treatment is of great concern, along with the lack of maintenance of the sewers. Seasonal flooding causes temporary but also mid- and long-term damage, especially to the infrastructure and the buildings, which all suffer from lack of maintenance.

Climate change is likely to affect Asmara through erratic and increased rainfall and flash floods, combined with an increase of drought, which can have important socio-economic effects.

For each affecting factor, the nomination dossier presents a set of strategic actions to be put in place.

ICOMOS notes that the challenges faced by Asmara are complex and manifold and require a proactive attitude.

ICOMOS considers that the main challenge for Asmara, that could turn into a threat if not addressed properly, is to retain the intact character of the urban environment of the historic perimeter, whilst achieving, at the same time, upgrade of the infrastructure, and maintenance and rehabilitation of the buildings, urban spaces and undeveloped or abandoned areas and facilities.

ICOMOS considers that the main threats to the property are the lack of maintenance and disrepair, but major threats might derive from uncontrolled development and inadequate rehabilitation of parts of the city, if these processes are not carefully planned and managed. The finalization of the plans and regulations currently under development are key to avoiding potential threats from development.

5 Protection, conservation and management

Boundaries of the nominated property and buffer zone

The nominated property has a total area of 1,684 ha, which encompasses a property of 481 ha and a buffer zone of 1,203 ha.

The nominated property includes the entirety of the Asmara Historic Perimeter and encompasses the 15 areas, which emerge from the study of the planned city.

ICOMOS requested additional information on the rationale for the boundaries of the nominated property in its letter dated 13 October 2016 and the State Party replied on 14 November 2016 explaining that the boundaries incorporate the urban layout that had evolved in different stages of planning. They include therefore the urban fabric which resulted from the implementation of Cavagnari's 1913 plan and its subsequent adaptations and extensions up until the 1938 urban plan by Vittorio Cafiero. The perimeter also contains the historic buildings with varied architectural forms and styles that were constructed throughout the same period, and especially between 1935-1941.

ICOMOS considers that the additional explanation from the State Party could be considered satisfactory, although it notes that at least part of Area 10 includes recent development and features that would not justify its inclusion in the nominated property. Area 8 is occupied by the American army barracks, which, although exhibiting historic significance, is not related to the proposed justification for inscription. Additionally, it is indicated as a special project. In ICOMOS's view, both areas would better serve the purposes of the buffer zone.

ICOMOS in its Interim Report suggested to the State Party to give consideration to redefining the boundaries in order to exclude these two areas from the nominated property.

The State Party responded in February 2017 and accepted the proposed changes to the boundaries as per the ICOMOS Interim Report for Area 8 and Area 10 and submitted an updated map of the nominated property and of the buffer zone.

ICOMOS welcomes the proposed amendments to the boundaries and considers that they are now adequate for both the nominated property and the buffer zone.

ICOMOS considers that the boundaries of the nominated property and of its buffer zone are adequate.

Ownership

Most of the elements of the property belong to private owners and only a limited proportion belongs to governmental and non-governmental institutions.

Protection

The nomination dossier lists several building regulations (Building Regulations 1914, 1938, Interim Building Regulations 2003 - not in force, Outline Urban Planning Regulations 2005), the Strategic Urban Development Plan 2006 (SUDP 2006) and the Cultural and Natural Heritage Proclamation (CNHP 2015).

Three bodies implement the above: the Department of Public Work Development (DPWD) and the Central Regional Administration manage the regulations, and the Ministry of Culture is responsible for the CNHP 2015.

Eritrea passed a new legislation named Cultural and Natural Heritage Proclamation n. 177/2015 on 30 September 2015 (CNHP-2015). Among the immovable assets that the Law lists as eligible for having national significance are immovable colonial heritage, buildings, market places, public squares, boulevards and other public or private structures, although it does not comprise among eligible categories urban areas, or historic districts or centres. No specific declaration for buildings or other historic areas within the historic perimeter of Asmara have been presented in the nomination dossier according to the new CNHP-2015 or to previous laws.

ICOMOS requested additional information on the legal instruments available for protection and how they altogether provide protection to the nominated property.

The State Party responded explaining that all regulations – with the exclusion of the Interim Building Regulations 2003 and the Draft Asmara Planning Norms and Regulations 2015, which are expected to be finalised by 2017 – are in force and that they have been backed by the moratorium on new construction issued in 2001. It also explained that the implementation of the provisions of the CNHP 2015 have yet to take shape.

In this regard, ICOMOS requested further clarification in its Interim Report. The State Party responded that, as per art. 25 of the Law n. 177/2015, the declaration of the property as a protected site shall adhere to all immovable properties falling within the nominated area.

ICOMOS notes that legal protection has been made possible by the Proclamation but that such protection has not yet taken the form of specific declarations or designations, either for each and every built asset or for the entirety of the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers finalisation of the legal protection of the property through designations is a necessary step.

At present, ICOMOS notes that the nominated property has been, overall, effectively protected mainly through urban instruments, the first being the *Regolamento Edilizio* 1938, which was issued at the time of Cafiero's plan and continued to be upheld through the decades.

Another key instrument for the protection of the property up to today has been the Asmara Municipality moratorium

on construction, which suspended the possibility of building high rise buildings in Asmara and was issued in 2001, based on the proclamation 86/1996 establishing local administrations and their tasks and responsibilities. This instrument appears to have been effective and the Asmara authorities need to be praised for this courageous decision, which has helped preserve the skyline and the character of the city. However, a moratorium cannot be considered a planning instrument *per se* and verification of the effectiveness of planning provisions in place and currently being prepared when the ban will be removed will be crucial.

Additional planning tools that have acted both as protection and management instruments are the Outline Urban Planning Regulation (OUPR) 2005 and the Strategic Urban Development Plan (SUDP) 2006.

The buffer zone will be subject to the provisions of the Urban Conservation Master Plan, the completion of which is expected by 2017, and strategic orientations contained in the OUPR 2005 and the SUDP 2006.

ICOMOS notes that it is not clear what the relationships between the four sub-zones of the OUPR 2005, currently in force, and the 15 zones of the Urban Conservation Master Plan are; nor is it clear what type of instrument is currently being applied to regulate conservation activities on existing buildings.

Additionally, the Draft Norms for the Implementation of the Conservation Master Plan subdivides the nominated property into three subzones A1, A2, A3, which are different from the 15 zones in which the nominated property is described.

ICOMOS requested clarification in this regard from the State Party and, in February 2017, the State Party submitted the detailed description of the zones of the OUPR 2005. The map submitted also clarifies that the zoning of the OUPR 2005 does not correspond to the 15 zones according to which the nominated property has been described. In this regard ICOMOS considers it crucial that the planning instruments under preparation and particularly the Urban Conservation Master Plan clarify the role of the 15 zones from a regulatory and planning perspective and should be put in place. At this stage, they do not seem integrated into the planning system in place nor is it clear if they will be in the future, based on the documentation made available by the State Party.

ICOMOS further considers that it would be important to have more clarification on how the provisions of the SUDP 2006 to open up the still-free building plots of the Historic Perimeter to new building 'under specific conditions' will be controlled and assessed in relation to the need to maintain the value of Asmara's Historic Urban landscape. ICOMOS has found that the regulations contained in the OUPR 2005 only provide for basic urban parameters but do not address the historic character of the urban architectural environment of Asmara.

In its interim report, ICOMOS requested additional information and clarification from the State Party in this regard. The State Party responded in February 2017 that the Urban Conservation Master Plan (UCMP), which is the specific instrument through which the nominated property will be managed, is currently under development and it is expected to be finalized by November 2017 and put into force in 2018. It will take precedence over the SUDP and OUPR 2005 provisions. The Asmara Planning Norms and Technical Regulations (APNTR), the regulatory instruments through which the UCMP will be implemented, are also under development and are expected to be finalized by 2017. Key elements of the *Regolamento Edilizio 1938* are considered still valid and applicable, particularly those that take into consideration the aesthetic aspects, the look and the character of the city, and therefore the articles that are still valid will be incorporated into the APNTR.

The nominated property will be managed according to the provisions of the UCMP and APNTR whilst the buffer zone will be regulated according to both the UCMP and the SUDP.

As for the interim Regulations, these were mainly intended for other areas of Asmara and not for its Historic Perimeter and will be replaced when permanent regulations are prepared.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the premises for legal protection have been set up through the approval of the Cultural and Natural Heritage Proclamation 2015. However, actual legal protection will be adequate when the implementation of the CNHP 2015 is in place through specific designations as per the provisions of the CNHP. ICOMOS considers that the protective measures for the property will be adequate when the provisions of the various regulations and plans currently in draft forms are approved and implemented. ICOMOS considers that an implementation calendar for the above should be developed by the State Party.

Conservation

The state of conservation of the property is uneven, in that certain buildings, namely governmental or commercial buildings, but generally all infrastructure and edifices, are in urgent need of intervention due to the prolonged lack of maintenance, which has caused severe decay in many instances.

The State Party has developed strategies, plans and programmes to tackle this large-scale problem. The Asmara Heritage Project Unit has been carrying out documentation and surveying activities on the condition of the built fabric of historic Asmara.

The cartographic documentation of the town, its sectors and buildings, is also a work in progress.

ICOMOS congratulates the State Party for the documentation activity that it has implemented and encourages it to continue such activity. ICOMOS however

also notes that the task of the active conservation, rehabilitation and maintenance of the property and its elements is huge and requires a substantial and steady influx of financial resources, which need to be supported by a careful fund-raising strategy, public-private partnerships, and accompanied by solid institutional, technical and administrative capacity.

Considering that most of the buildings are in private ownership, ICOMOS observes that there would be a need for the involvement of the owners and the local community as well as a system of incentives and subventions to activate widespread rehabilitation and conservation interventions from individual owners.

ICOMOS requested the State Party for additional information on the measures and mechanisms envisaged to sustain the rehabilitation of the city, and to assist the private owners to carry out the necessary conservation measures, as well as to develop the economic activity that could support the livelihood of Asmara's population and sustain its particular character.

The State Party answered that recently measures have been put in place by Asmara Municipality for infrastructure, streets and street furniture. Other projects for public facilities and spaces have been undertaken by the Central Region Administration. The Asmara Heritage Project has been awarded a grant by the European Union for a two-year project on capacity building for safeguarding Asmara's urban environment. Reported specific measures to assist the private owners in carrying out conservation include awareness raising, technical staff training, capacity building of local contractors as well as subsidies to support the purchase of specific materials and administrative measures to facilitate the reactivation of economic activities.

ICOMOS considers that what has been envisaged by the State Party points in the right direction but loan programmes and tax reduction measures would be needed to complement and support the private rehabilitation initiatives.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the active conservation of the nominated property represents one of the biggest challenges and requires strategies to ensure a steady influx of financial resources, including loans and tax reduction or exemption measures, substantial qualified human resources, and considerable institutional and technical capacity.

Management

Management structures and processes, including traditional management processes

The key organisations for the protection and management of the nominated property include the Central Regional Administration, and its departments, among which the Department of Public Works Development (DPWD) plays a major role. It is supported in its activities by the Asmara Heritage Project, an agency established in 2014 by the

Department of Public Works that is charged with the development of the nomination dossier and the implementation of the Integrated Management Plan – IMP (developed in 2016, approval expected in 2017). Its duties include issuing building permits, permission for conservation and maintenance works, and enforcing compliance with building regulations. The Integrated Management Plan however envisages one additional centralised agency – the Focal Organ – which is expected to be set up in 2017.

ICOMOS requested additional clarification on the Focal Organ in October 2016. The State Party replied that the new Organ will be established soon. The IMP envisages extending the tasks and responsibilities of the Asmara Heritage Project (AHP) to the management of the nominated property and the AHP will have a revised organizational structure to reflect the basic structural organs and mandate specified in the CNHP.

In its Interim Report, ICOMOS requested updated information with regard to the implementation timeframe for the establishment of the revised management body. The State Party responded in February 2017 that the management body tasked with coordinating functions was in the process of being set up.

Policy framework: management plans and arrangements, including visitor management and presentation

The Integrated Management Plan, which also includes a disaster risk management framework, was finalised in January 2016, and endorsed by the Ministry of Education, the Commission on Culture and Sports and the Central Region Administration in September 2016, as explained in the additional information submitted in February 2017 by the State Party.

The objectives of the IMP with regard to tourism development find their broader framework in the National Tourism Development Plan. The additional information provided by the State Party explains that this Plan was approved in 1999 with a 20-year time-scale (2000-2020). It envisaged a number of projects, only a few of which were implemented. Other ones – Roof Africa Hotel, a conference centre, a golf course, a national zoological garden and ethnographic museum, Derfo Valley tourism lodge, restaurants and viewpoints – were not implemented and there is no plan to develop them.

The State Party informs also that in case any future project should be proposed, prior notice will be given to the World Heritage Centre in compliance with paragraph 172 of the *Operational Guidelines*.

ICOMOS notes that there are a number of planning instruments either in place or under development and it is important that their coordination and integration is ensured and based on objectives related to the conservation and enhancement of the attributes of the nominated property.

ICOMOS considers that all plans need to provide consistent and integrated measures for the protection and management of the nominated property and this does not yet seem to be the case, due to the many plans and instruments being developed in parallel.

In its Interim Report, ICOMOS requested additional information from the State Party in this regard. The State Party responded in February 2017 and explained the role of each plan and regulation and the way in which they will integrate with one another, once the plans and related regulations are finalised, approved and enter into force.

ICOMOS considers that the clarifications provided are reassuring but also notes that the UCMP and the APNTR are not yet finalised. Therefore, they need to be expeditiously completed, approved and implemented, in order to ensure the adequate and coordinated management of the property. Pending their approval and implementation, the IMP cannot alone ensure the necessary protection and management.

Involvement of the local communities

Considering the crucial role that will need to be played by the private owners in order to have a successful conservation programme that is extensive and complex, in its Interim Report, ICOMOS requested clarification about the involvement of the local communities and owners in the nomination process. The State Party responded in February 2017 providing explanations on the meetings, public hearings and stakeholders' consultations organized with the civil society and the inhabitants of Asmara to involve them during the elaboration of the nomination proposal.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the management system for the property will be adequate when all plans, regulations and guidelines currently under development, particularly the Urban Conservation Master Plan (UCMP) and the Asmara Planning Norms and Technical Regulations (APNTR), are finalized, approved and implemented. This step is crucial to ensuring the effective protection and management of the nominated property. ICOMOS considers that special attention is needed to ensure that the regulations that will be applied to the nominated property take into due account the 15 zones in which Asmara has been subdivided and adapt the OUPR 2005 or any future regulations to the new zones where necessary. The management system should be extended to include guidelines for any new construction within the nominated property, that help respect the urban and architectural specificity of the nominated property, and its immediate and wider setting.

6 Monitoring

The monitoring system has been developed around the documentation and conservation objectives for the nominated property. Indicators have been identified accordingly.

ICOMOS considers that the current monitoring system is a good basis but needs to be further implemented and related to the management objectives, that cannot be confined to the conservation of the buildings or of the urban infrastructure, although these are certainly very important. For instance, the nomination dossier mentions also a disaster risk management system and programmes for raising awareness, as well as a tourism development plan. The achievement of their objectives should also be monitored and evaluated.

ICOMOS therefore suggests further developing the monitoring system so as to measure both the advancement in documentation and conservation activities but also all other management objectives and the major factors affecting the properties.

In conclusion, ICOMOS considers that the monitoring system should be expanded to cover all factors affecting the property and all related management objectives.

7 Conclusions

The property being nominated includes the urban layout and fabric of the historic perimeter of Asmara, which emerged from the different planning phases, and a large number of buildings designed in the early modernist and rationalist architectural idiom of the fascist era. It also includes the indigenous unplanned neighbourhoods of Arbata Asmera and Abbashawel, which were incorporated into the new planned city as part of the indigenous quarters.

Asmara is an exceptionally well-preserved planned urban ensemble based on an orthogonal grid plan combined with diagonal axes, characterised by a human scale, eclectic and rationalist built forms, well-defined open spaces, and public and private buildings.

ICOMOS has found that out of the three criteria under which the property has been nominated, two – criteria (ii) and (iv) – have been fully justified thanks also to the focused additional information provided by the State Party during the evaluation process. On the other hand, criterion (iii) was found not relevant in relation to the capacity of the property to exhibit through its tangible evidence the proposed associative values, which suggest a national scope. However, the justification for criterion (ii) expresses powerfully the dynamic processes of cultural interchange that underlie the strong associations between Eritreans and their capital city and the role it played in the struggle for self-determination.

The State Party has fully harnessed the opportunities offered by the evaluation process and has achieved a greater straightforwardness in presenting information and arguments supporting the justification for inscription and the description of the overall multi-layered protection and management system for the nominated property and its buffer zone.

This protection system dates back to the time when the city was planned and constructed and is essentially based on the *Regolamento Edilizio 1938*, which was issued at the time of Cafiero's plan and continued to be upheld through the decades; it was further complemented since Eritrea's independence by important protective measures that have ensured the preservation of the urban and built fabric and character of Asmara, first and foremost by the moratorium on high-rise buildings issued in 2001. Asmara's authorities should be praised for the efforts made for almost 20 years to protect the city.

The Municipality nonetheless has progressively developed planning instruments to complement the above key protection instruments through additional regulations and plans. In 2015, Eritrea issued the Cultural and Natural Heritage Proclamation, which will provide the nominated property with legal protection. An Urban Conservation Master Plan specifically dedicated to the nominated property and its buffer zone, equipped with ad-hoc regulations – Asmara Planning Norms and Technical Regulations – is being prepared and its finalization is expected by the end of 2017, with implementation envisaged at the beginning of 2018.

ICOMOS considers that all these are important steps which need to be urgently finalized and put in place, in order to strengthen the protection so far ensured by planning regulations and the moratorium on construction, and also in view of the new challenges that the city may find itself facing due to the exceptional visibility that will be triggered by the nomination.

ICOMOS therefore fully supports the inscription of the property on the World Heritage List but also considers that legal and planning protection be guaranteed by the expeditious completion and enforcement of the necessary instruments currently under development for a strengthened protection and management.

ICOMOS also suggests that the name of the nominated property be slightly modified to become: "Asmara: a Modernist City of Africa".

8 Recommendations

Recommendations with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Asmara, Africa's Modernist City, Eritrea, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria (ii) and (iv)**.

Recommended Statement of Outstanding Universal Value

Brief synthesis

Located on an upland plateau at the centre of Eritrea, Asmara, a Modernist city of Africa is the capital of the country and is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a colonial planned city, which resulted from the subsequent phases of planning between 1893 and 1941, under the Italian colonial occupation. Its urban layout is based mainly on an orthogonal grid which later integrated elements of a radial system. Asmara preserves an unusually intact human scale, featuring eclectic and rationalist built forms, well-defined open spaces, and public and private buildings, including cinemas, shops, banks, religious structures, public and private offices, industrial facilities, and residences. Altogether, Asmara's urban-scape outstandingly conveys how colonial planning, based on functional and racial segregation principles, was applied and adapted to the local geographical conditions to achieve symbolic messages and functional requirements. The town has come to be associated with the struggle of the Eritrean people for self-determination, which was pursued whilst embracing the tangible, yet exceptional, evidence of their colonial past.

Asmara's urban character and strong urban form exhibits a human scale in the relationship between buildings, streets, open spaces, and related activities adapted to the local conditions, which embodies both colonial and post-colonial African life, with its public spaces, mixed-use fabric and place-based material culture. These spaces and use patterns also bear witness to interchange and cultural assimilation of successive encounters with different cultures as well as to the role played by Asmara in building people identity that also allowed for early efforts for its preservation. Asmara's urban layout with its different patterns associated to the planning phases, illustrates the adaptation of the modern urban planning and architectural models to local cultural and geographical conditions. The ensembles attesting to the colonial power and to the presence of the copt, jewish communities of the Asmaran society, with their institutional and religious places, the elements of the urban architecture (Harnet et Sematat avenues; Mai Jah park; the walking paths; the old plaques with traces of the street names), the buildings, complexes and facilities resulting from the 1930s programmes (the post office building at Senegyeti avenue) the cinemas (Impero, Roma, Odeon, Capitol, Hamasien) the schools, the sport facilities, the garages, the residential complexes and buildings, the villas, the commercial buildings, the factories (soap and textiles); the cores of the community quarters (e.g. the Italian quarter, the Copt quarter and the Muslim quarter). The major cult places, marking the landscape with bell-towers, towers, and minarets, civil and military cemeteries illustrate the diversity of the populations and of their rituals. The main trade route which has been incorporated into the plan, the Capitol area with ministerial buildings and the governor palace, the public markets, the service stations.

Criterion (ii): Asmara, a Modernist City of Africa represents an outstanding example of the transposition and materialization of ideas about planning that developed in Europe and North America, in the multi-confessional African context and were used for functional and segregation purposes; the adaptation to the local context is reflected in the urban distribution and functional zoning, and in the architectural forms, which, although expressing a modernist and rationalist idiom, borrowed morphologies, construction methods, local materials combined with imported ones, as well as the use of local skills and workforce. The way in which Asmara came into being contributed to Eritreans' particular response to the tangible legacies of their colonial past. Despite the evidence of its colonial imprint, Asmara has been incorporated into the Eritrean identity and struggle for self-determination and has been the object of early efforts for its protection.

Criterion (iv): Asmara's urban layout and character, in combining the orthogonal grid with radial street patterns, integrating topographical features, taking into account local cultural conditions created by different ethnic and religious groups, and using the principle of zoning for achieving racial segregation and functional organisation, bears exceptional witness to the development of the new discipline of urban planning at the beginning of the 20th century and its application in an African context, to serve the Italian colonial agenda. This hybrid plan, that combined the functional approach of the grid with the search for the picturesque and the creation of scenic spaces, vistas, civic plaza and monumental places, served the functional, civic and symbolic requirements for a colonial capital. The architecture of Asmara complements the plan and forms a coherent whole, although reflecting eclecticism and rationalist idioms, and is one of the most complete and intact collections of modernist/rationalist architecture in the world.

Integrity

All the significant architectural structures and the original urban layout, including most of the characteristic features and public spaces, have been retained in their entirety. The site has also preserved its historical, cultural, functional and architectural integrity with its elements largely intact and generally in relatively acceptable condition, although a number of buildings suffer from lack of maintenance. Limited negative impacts have been the occasional inappropriate restoration of older structures and the construction of some buildings in the late 20th century that are inappropriate in size, scale or character. Despite continuing developmental pressures, the establishment of the 'Historic Perimeter' around the centre of the city since 2001 and a moratorium on new construction within this perimeter by the municipal authorities have safeguarded the site's integrity.

The integrity of the intangible attributes associated with the local community that has inhabited parts of the site for centuries has been maintained through a process of cultural continuity that, despite successive waves of

foreign influence, has been successfully assimilated into a modern national consciousness and a national capital. Authenticity

Asmara's combination of innovative town planning and modernist architecture in an African context represents important and early developmental phases of town planning and architectural modernism that are still fully reflected in its layout, urban character and architecture.

Climatic, cultural, economic and political conditions over subsequent decades have favoured the retention of the artistic, material and functional attributes of the city's architectural elements to an almost unique degree of intactness, which allows also for future research on the history of construction of its buildings.

The authenticity of local intangible attributes manifested in language, cultural practices, identity, and sense of place have been retained through Asmara's evolution from an indigenous centre of economy and administration, through a colonial capital, to a modern African capital.

Management and protection requirements

The protection of Asmara has been granted by the *Regolamento Edilizio 1938*, issued at the time of Cafiero's plan, and by the moratorium on new construction issued in 2001. The Cultural and Natural Heritage Proclamation 2015 provides conditions for the legal protection of the property through ad-hoc designations. The Asmara Heritage Project and the Department of Public Works Development hold responsibilities for issuing building permits and granting permission for maintenance works in compliance with existing regulations. Planning instruments at different scales are crucial in complementing the legal protection of Asmara and its setting and in guaranteeing its effective management: the Urban Conservation Master Plan and the related Asmara Planning Norms and Technical Regulations under development are key tools in this regard. Both need to ensure that the intactness of Asmara's urban and built fabric, its human scale and specific modernist yet African character, are preserved, though favouring proactive maintenance, conservation and rehabilitation of its urban fabric and spaces. Given the several administrative/technical structures and instruments already in place, the envisaged management framework needs to build on existing experiences and structures and ensure coordination and clear mandates, which avoid duplication.

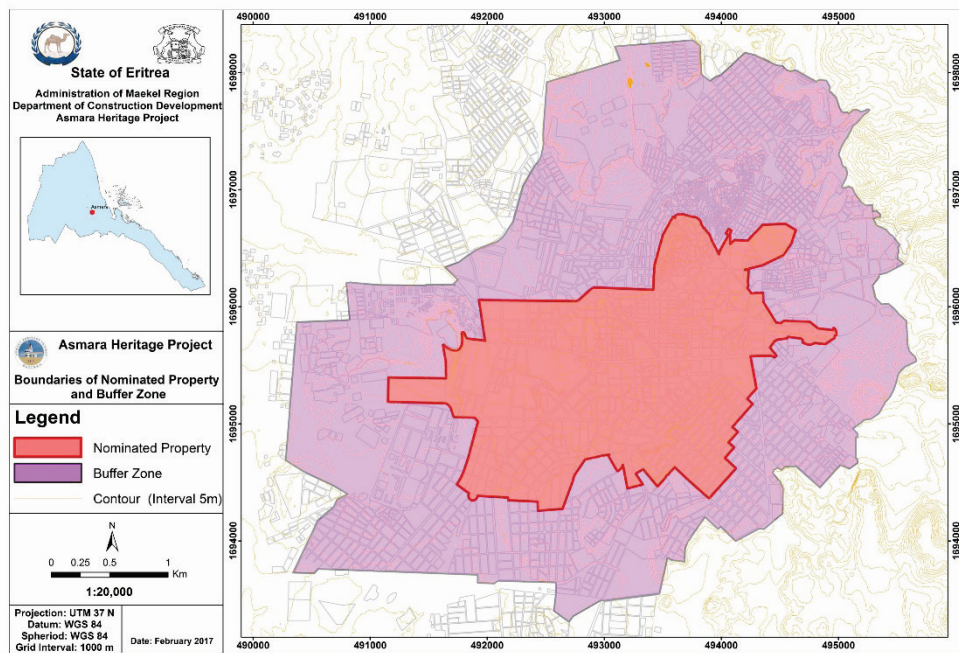
Additional recommendations

ICOMOS recommends that the State Party give consideration to the following:

- a) Issuing the specific protective designations for the property as per the provisions of the CNHP 2015 and developing an implementation calendar to monitor advancements in this regard,

- b) Finalising the Urban Conservation Master Plan and the Asmara Planning Norms and Technical Regulations, making consistent the zoning in the relevant plan and regulations, taking into account the 15 zones of the urban analysis, and developing action plans with clear priorities for conservation intervention and budget proposals,
- c) Developing strategies to ensure a steady influx of financial resources, including loans and tax reduction or exemption measures, substantial qualified human resources, and considerable institutional and technical capacity,
- d) Setting up the central management body envisaged by the Integrated Management Plan, based on the existing capacities and functioning structures, and giving it the function to coordinate all relevant stakeholders, both public and private, acting within the property and its buffer zone and providing it with the necessary technical and financial means and adequate human resources,
- e) Clarifying the geographical coordinates of the property and of the buffer zone,
- f) Submitting to the World Heritage Centre by 1st December 2018 a State of Conservation report on the progress on the above-mentioned recommendations, for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 43rd session in 2019;

Moreover, ICOMOS recommends that the name of the property be modified to become: "Asmara: a Modernist City of Africa".



Map showing the revised boundaries of the nominated property



Aerial view of Asmara



The Catholic Cathedral and the minaret of the Grand Mosque between the towers of St Mary's Orthodox Cathedral



Fiat Tagliero service station



Bar Zilli area 2