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Evaluation of Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Valley: originary habitat of Mesoamerica – Nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List 2017

IUCN and ICOMOS Interim Report and Request for supplementary information

Dear Ambassador,

As per the revised Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have been requested to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2017. We are therefore grateful to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process and further request for supplementary information.

The joint IUCN/ICOMOS World Heritage technical evaluation mission to "Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Valley: originary habitat of Mesoamerica" was undertaken by Mrs Thora Amend for IUCN and Mrs Luisa Diaz Arriola for ICOMOS from 16 to 24 October 2016. The evaluators greatly appreciated the excellent support and co-operation provided by your colleagues in the preparation and implementation of the mission, and the kind welcome of the State Party throughout the mission. Please convey our sincere thanks to all of the officials, scientists and contributors that assisted the mission.

On 4 October 2016, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the maps, the description of the property, the authenticity and integrity, the comparative analysis, the state of conservation, the management plan and the tourism facilities. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 14 November 2016 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

From 21 to 29 November 2016, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2017. The IUCN World Heritage Panel was held from 5 to 9 December 2016 and evaluated the natural and mixed properties. This process will conclude in March/April 2017, following which the Advisory Bodies evaluation reports will be issued to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre.

The nomination dossier, additional information, together with missions and desk review reports as well as other references regarding the nominated property were carefully examined by the ICOMOS and IUCN's Panel members to formulate their recommendations and considerations.

ICOMOS thank you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on 25 November 2016 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. During its last part meeting, the Panel has identified areas, which would require the need to review, augment and possibly reconfigure the nomination dossier.

While the ICOMOS Panel considered that the "Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Valley, as representative of the Originary Habitat of Mesoamerica", might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) in relation to cultural criteria, this has not yet been clearly demonstrated.

The IUCN Panel greatly appreciated the efforts that have been made in relation to the nomination that has been prepared.

Therefore, IUCN/ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

1. The ICOMOS Panel did not fully understand what linked all the 22 cultural sites of the nomination, so that the valley as a whole could be seen to be exceptional in cultural terms. This issue appeared to the members of the ICOMOS Panel to relate to how the sites were described and also to the questions of crop development and water management.

The ICOMOS Panel considered that what is not quite clear is how the valley as a whole can be seen as exceptional for the way it reflects the early domestication of crops and the development of irrigated agriculture – in a way that is not reflected elsewhere in Mesoamerica, and the ICOMOS Panel considered, above all, that there is a need to demonstrate a stronger continuity between the sites, which would help to reinforce the proposed justification for inscription.

While individual archaeological elements in the landscape have been better described in the supplementary material (statement of integrity and authenticity) provided by the State Party, the ICOMOS Panel considered that description would be even clearer if it was organised in chronological order, rather than strictly articulated around the historical and archaeological sites within the components.

As a consequence of these observations, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider further questions on the two aspects of crop development and water management:

- a. On crop development, the nomination dossier says that the oldest remains of cultivated plants found in the property have contributed to how the Valley achieved worldwide relevance as a priority area to understand the development of plant domestication, therefore the origin of agriculture, revolutionising the knowledge of the history of humankind in the American continent.

It would be helpful if that evidence could be more fully set out, in relation to the original excavations and further confirmatory work carried out since, and if the places associated with the evidence were more clearly identified.

Moreover, it would also be helpful to understand how these finds relate to those linked to the early domestication of crops in Oaxaca. The "Prehistoric Caves of Yagul and Mitla in the Central Valley of Oaxaca" property was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 2010 for the way they demonstrate the link between man and nature that was the origin to the domestication of plants in North America, thus allowing the rise of Mesoamerican civilizations. The Oaxaca property was not mentioned in detail in the nomination dossier, but the State Party has since provided additional information on comparisons between the two areas.

As both the nominated property and Oaxaca are said to be related to sites that reflect the first cultivation of crops, the ICOMOS Panel considered that further clarification was needed, as to know which precise sites are related to the very first evidence for crop cultivation.

- b. With regards to water management, which the ICOMOS Panel considered to be the strongest part of the nomination, it would be helpful to understand more clearly the historical continuity between the diverse types of sites and their relationship with settled communities - the dates of the horticultural villages overlap with the dates for the irrigation and salt production, while craft production sites for pottery and the production of cotton textiles appear to have a much earlier date. In addition, regarding this aspect, the comparative analysis would have to be fairly developed.
2. Please provide evidence, including clear maps, which confirm that the attributes of the nominated property's stated Outstanding Universal Value occur within the nominated area. The IUCN Panel is seeking further clarity on the spatial distribution of key attributes to confirm that, within the overall Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Biosphere Reserve, these are located in the nominated area, as distinct from the World Heritage buffer zone, or the wider landscape within which the nominated property is located. There was concern that it was not clear that the attributes are in fact located in the nominated property, and may be also within the buffer zone and in the wider regional setting, which would raise questions about boundary design and integrity.

3. The IUCN Panel noted that the scope of involvement of local communities in the nominated property is not clear. We would therefore request that the State party provide a clear account of the proposed governance structure for the nominated property, including how participation of local communities and traditional management will be considered and supported.
4. The ICOMOS Panel considered the protection of the archaeological material, and would be pleased to understand how the Management Plan of the archaeological sites (in progress), is to be integrated in the overall Management Plan of the Biosphere Reserve.
5. Please share the current budget and financial analysis to confirm the long-term funding of the nominated property.
6. Please provide additional detail on the staffing situation for the nominated property, including staffing levels, staff stability/turnover, professional qualifications, and funding options for staffing and capacity development.
7. Please elaborate on the committed plans to undertake the necessary updates of the Nature Tourism Strategy for the Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Biosphere Reserve (Puebla-Oaxaca 2010-2015), with respect to specifically how it will relate to the nominated property which is only a part of the overall biosphere reserve. The IUCN Panel wishes to better understand how carrying capacities regarding visitor numbers will be defined and managed; how local people and entrepreneurs will be involved and the approach that will be taken to tourism related development and financing.

While details were already given on tourism access in the additional information sent by the State Party, the ICOMOS Panel would like to make sure that an influx of visitors is not going to impact the archaeological sites, knowing that a good lot of them are not easily accessible though. Therefore, ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could provide details on how a visitor management plan could be developed for the overall property in the context of a potential increase in visitors with specific reference to the archaeological heritage and how this is to be interpreted.

We would appreciate your response to the above points as soon as possible, in order to facilitate the evaluation process, but **no later than the 28 February 2017**, as per paragraph 148 of the Operational Guidelines. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by IUCN/ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while IUCN and ICOMOS will carefully consider any supplementary information submitted, it cannot properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or large amounts of new information submitted at the last minute. So we request to keep your response concise and respond only to the above requests.

Supplementary information should be submitted officially in three copies to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in order for it to be registered as part of the nomination. An electronic copy of any supplementary information to both the UNESCO World Heritage Centre (a.balsamo@unesco.org) and IUCN Headquarters (christelle.perruchoud@iucn.org) and ICOMOS Headquarters (apsara.sanchez@icomos.org) would also be helpful.

Taking into account your response, IUCN and ICOMOS will formulate their final recommendation to the World Heritage Committee which will meet from 2 to 12 July 2017 in Krakow, Poland.

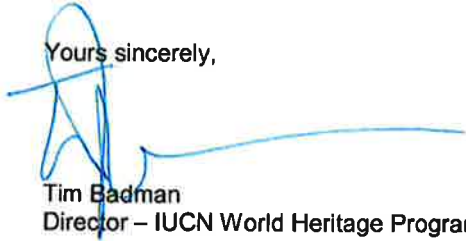
In the interest of ensuring dialogue with the States Parties, IUCN and ICOMOS would be ready for a Skype call to clarify any of the above points, or other matters related to the nomination dossier, if that might be considered to be helpful.

IUCN is also available to meet you in person in Paris if this would be helpful. You or your representatives are also most welcome to visit IUCN's headquarters in Switzerland to meet in person if you wish, on this nomination, or on any other matter of interest.

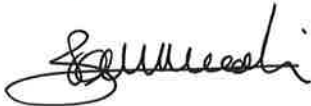
Please do not hesitate to contact Ms Christelle Perruchoud, World Heritage Evaluations and Operations Officer (Tel: +41 22 999 0358; Fax: +41 22 999 0002; email: christelle.perruchoud@iucn.org) or Mrs Gwenaëlle Bourdin, Director of the ICOMOS Evaluation Unit (Tel: +33 (0)1 41 94 17 59, email: gwenaelle.bourdin@icomos.org) if you have any questions regarding this request, or if you would wish to arrange a meeting or phone call to discuss this request.

Please allow me to reiterate our thanks for your support of the World Heritage Convention and for the conduct of IUCN/ICOMOS joint mission. We look forward to your kind cooperation in furnishing responses to the abovementioned points.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Badman
Director – IUCN World Heritage Programme



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

cc. Comisión Mexicana de Cooperación con la UNESCO – CONALMEX, Doctor Benito Mirón López, Secretario General
UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Mr Mauro Rosi and Mr Alessandro Balsamo
IUCN Regional Office for Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, Dr. Grethel Aguilar, Regional Director
ICOMOS, Mrs Gwenaëlle Bourdin, Director Evaluation Unit