Dear Madam,

As prescribed by 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 2018. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to “Caliphate City of Medina Azahara” was carried out by Attilio Petruccioli (Italy) from 25 to 29 September 2017. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organization and implementation of the mission.

At the end of November 2017, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2018. The additional information provided by the State Party, together with mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members. This process will conclude in March 2018.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on Friday 24 November 2017 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting. During its last part meeting, the Panel has identified areas where it considers that further information is needed. Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

**Name of the property**
With regards to the official name of the nominated property, “Caliphate City of Medina Azahara”, the ICOMOS Panel would be pleased if the State Party could provide further explanation on the reasons why the Arabic, historical and presumably authentic, name of Madinat al-Zahara has not been retained.

**History and development**
The ICOMOS Panel has understood that the Caliphate City of Medina Azahara is in many ways related to the Caliphate of Cordoba. The nature and extent of such relationship is not explicitly presented in the nomination dossier. Therefore, the ICOMOS Panel would welcome further information explaining the historical, cultural, social and political relationship between Medina Azahara and Cordoba.
Could the State Party further clarify if there are any indications of cultural contacts and exchanges between the Umayyad al-Andalous and the Spanish (Christian) civilization around the nominated property, with regards, for example, to architecture, building techniques, materials, ornaments, or choice of location in the landscape?

Buffer zone
The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission noticed that there are several illegal settlements namely in Cordoba la Vieja, Las Pitas and Gorgoja II (348 homes in total, comprising cottages of one or two floors) that might compromise the viewsheds between the nominated component parts and within the proposed buffer zone. Could the State Party provide further information regarding the proposed measures and mechanisms in place to prevent new illegal constructions; mitigate the edges of the illegal settlements with hard and soft landscaping; and monitor the sensitive areas where the pressures for urbanization is higher?

Protection
With regards to the layout of the buffer zone, the perimeters covered by the Special Protection Plan and the Property of Cultural Interest do not coincide in the area of the A-431 Cordoba to Palma del Río road. Could the State Party please provide further information regarding this apparent inconsistency related to the perimeters of protection of the nominated property?

Conservation
The nomination dossier states that "Throughout its century or so of life, the archaeological site of Medina Azahara has passed through a logical evolution in the criteria of its conservation work" (page 104), but the details about the conservation doctrine used at the site remain unclear. Could the State Party please provide further information on: (i) What were the changes in conservation doctrine and the differing criteria that were adopted? (ii) How have they logically evolved over time? (iii) How does the site show this evolution?

The ICOMOS Panel understood that there are incomplete records of previous archaeological excavations and investigations undertaken at the archaeological site before 1985 and there are also no records of archaeological surveys before that date. Therefore, the ICOMOS Panel would appreciate if the State Party could provide further information regarding the actual situation of the records before 1985 and the proposed measures to mitigate this information deficit.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission noted problems with the conservation of the borders of the excavated areas and holes made by previous excavations, namely those areas south and west of the House of the Pool and the south-west corner of the Upper Garden. Could the State Party provide the timeframe for the implementation of the comprehensive project to control and manage the excavated edges?

During the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, other issues related to the conservation were identified by our mission expert. These concerns:

- Extensive surfaces of ataurique decorative pieces are lying on the floor of the Outer Walkway, the north-eastern quadrant of the Upper Garden and the Lower Garden, an area now closed to the public.
- The fact that the main part of the visitor's route runs along the original floors of calcarenite limestone pavements preserved in situ, affecting their preservation.
- Some interventions at the site still require further work due to crumbling and loss of ashlars, including the Outer Covered Walkway and the House of the Pool.
- Some excavated parts (e.g. the Hall of the double columns and two areas to the west and the south of the House of the Pool) are affected by degradation and erosion and need particular urgent attention.

Although some solutions to issues raised above have been envisaged and discussed during the ICOMOS technical evaluation mission, the ICOMOS Panel would welcome further information regarding specific
conservation strategies to address these issues as well as the indication of the timeframe for implementation of such activities.

Management
Could the State Party provide additional information regarding the long-term role of the museum about research and conservation activities related to the nominated property, including documentation on excavations and conservation works, storage of archaeological artefacts and museum collection, as well as for education and outreach actions?

Involvement of the local communities
The ICOMOS Panel has understood that the local business and tourism management communities within the city were not involved in the preparation of the nomination and are not involved in any meaningful way on the management of the property. Therefore, the ICOMOS Panel would be grateful if the State Party could provide information regarding the strategy and mechanism to increase the level of participation of the local community in the management of the property.

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation process.

We would be grateful if you could provide ICOMOS and the World Heritage Centre with the above information by 28 February 2018 at the latest, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the Operational Guidelines for supplementary information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by ICOMOS in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while 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 would be grateful if the State Party could keep its response concise and respond only to the above requests.

We thank you for your support of the World Heritage Convention and the evaluation process.

Yours faithfully,

Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to Andalusian Regional Ministry of Culture
Dirección General de Bienes Culturales
UNESCO World Heritage Centre