

International Seminar
“Living Religious World Heritage: Participatory Management and Sustainable Use”
First Network Meeting of site managers of World Heritage properties of religious interest
Kyiv, Ukraine
31 October – 2 November 2018

**Video message by Mechtild Rössler, Director of the Division for Heritage and the UNESCO
World Heritage Centre**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear participants,

I am most honoured to send this welcome message to the organisers and participants of the International Seminar “Living Religious World Heritage: Participatory Management and Sustainable Use” and of the first Network Meeting of site managers of World Heritage properties of religious interest.

I would also like to thank Ukraine for its longstanding cooperation.

UNESCO is guided by the conviction that the protection of cultural and natural heritage contributes greatly to lasting international peace. Sites of unique value are located all over the world, encompassing monuments, sites and landscapes. In our aim to safeguard heritage, it should be understood in the broadest sense.

Sites with associative values, connected to traditions or belief systems, form the foundation of our cultures. Identifying and acknowledging all interconnected values becomes therefore a priority for UNESCO, but also for the whole of humanity.

In recent years, UNESCO played a leading role in the development and promotion of powerful actions related to the protection of cultural and natural heritage in all its forms.

The UNESCO Initiative on heritage of religious interest serves the objectives of the World Heritage Convention. World Heritage properties such as living religious and sacred sites, constitute one of the largest thematic categories on the World Heritage List, and require specific policies for protection and management that takes in account their distinct associated sacred value as a key factor for their conservation.

It is in this spirit that the World Heritage Committee, in 2010, requested the World Heritage Centre, in collaboration with the Advisory Bodies, to elaborate a thematic paper proposing to State Parties general guidance regarding the management of their cultural and natural heritage of religious interest.

The establishment of a constructive dialogue with all stakeholders concerned is essential for developing such a document.

Dialogue is the primary tool in our work towards peace and sustainable development. The World Heritage Centre has focused on enhancing dialogue through the implementation of global activities focusing on heritage with associative values.

Properties of religious interest have the potential to foster mutual respect among communities by enhancing knowledge and mutual understanding through intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

The future of religious heritage calls for dialogue between policy makers, urban planners, city developers, architects, conservationists, property owners, investors and concerned religious authorities, working together to preserve the sacred heritage while taking into account modernization and development of society in a culturally and historically sensitive manner and with a view to strengthening identity and social cohesion.

This meeting represents a cornerstone in helping to achieve the strategic goals of the Convention, namely involving communities in initiatives to safeguard heritage values and broadening the efforts of the global community. In this process, UNESCO's role is to facilitate the development of this new vision for the protection of religious heritage and to coordinate the implementation of activities world-wide.

Legal protection is not sufficient for the preservation of living religious and sacred sites and their transmission to future generations, as their survival depends on the role played daily by the religious communities in caring for these as living heritage. Therefore, management of these sites requires the mutual acceptance and respect between stakeholders, as well as adapted measures of conservation for enhancing the integrity, sustaining spiritual identity, associated sacred values and the survival of a site's outstanding universal value.

The International Seminar on the Role of Religious Communities in the Management of World Heritage properties, organized in Kiev, Ukraine, in November 2010, resulted in the adoption of a Statement on the Protection of Religious Properties within the Framework of the World Heritage Convention.

It identified partnerships between national authorities and local and religious communities as a key principle for the successful management of World Heritage properties of religious interest. The role played by religious communities in the creation, maintenance, and continuous shaping of sacred places was recognised. Culturally and environmentally sustainable management of heritage and of religious interest should be the responsibility of all stakeholders concerned, and that mutual acceptance and respect will bring different and complementary perspectives to shared cultural and spiritual values.

The preservation of the spirit of place, the knowledge and understanding of traditions and the willingness to accept each other, are the necessary components to be respected for the protection and preservation of these living sites. An essential step is to establish appropriate measures for respecting the identity of properties with religious or spiritual meaning, for studying the traditions, for collaborating with the communities involved in their safeguarding and for understanding which benefits their protection represent for humanity.

The UNESCO Initiative on Heritage of Religious Interest is an example of a thematic approach in heritage conservation that is proposing new forms of action to promote social cohesion and peaceful interaction among cultures.

UNESCO's leading role is to support this dialogue, to ensure the conditions for development of an integrated vision for the protection of heritage of religious interest.

We think that it is especially important that general guidance be developed in conjunction with all interested parties and be based on the fundamental principles of the World Heritage Convention.

Only through concerted cooperation with all stakeholders concerned can we hope to meet our common objective of preservation and transmission of our common heritage for future generations.

I wish you all successful conference, and I look forward to continue working with you in the future.