

ICOMOS

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON MONUMENTS AND SITES
CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES MONUMENTS ET DES SITES
CONSEJO INTERNACIONAL DE MONUMENTOS Y SITIOS
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЙ СОВЕТ ПО ВОПРОСАМ ПАМЯТНИКОВ И ДОСТОПРИМЕЧАТЕЛЬНЫХ МЕСТ

Our Ref. GB/AS/1549/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 23 January 2016

H. E. Mr Anar Karimov
Permanent Delegation of Azerbaijan to
UNESCO
Maison de l'UNESCO
1, rue Miollis
75732 Paris Cedex 15

World Heritage List 2017

Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace (Azerbaijan)

Dear Sir,

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 2017. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to "Historic Centre of Sheki with the Khan's Palace" was carried out by Ms Nato Tsintsabadze (Georgia) from 4 to 8 July 2016. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organisation and implementation of the mission.

At the end of November 2016, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2017. The nomination dossier, together with mission and desk review reports were carefully examined by the Panel members.

We 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 of meeting, the ICOMOS Panel discussed this nomination and came to the conclusion that the property does not fulfil the requirements set out in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention.

Therefore, ICOMOS will recommend to the World Heritage Committee that the property should not be inscribed on the World Heritage List. Unlike in past years, ICOMOS has opted for a new policy to notify States Parties of these particular decisions as early as possible.

While all the ICOMOS Panel decisions regarding non-inscriptions are final, ICOMOS would nevertheless like to share a summary of the considerations that led the ICOMOS Panel to adopt such a recommendation.

The ICOMOS Panel discussion focused on the justification of Outstanding Universal Value for the property, its authenticity and integrity as well as more general aspects of capacity building for site management and conservation. The ICOMOS Panel members did not consider that the physical attributes, which were presented as substantiating Sheki's proposed Outstanding Universal Value, had potential to stand out among

other cities along key trade routes at a global level or within the wider geo-cultural region. This judgement considered the fact that Sheki's architectural and urban testimony is rather homogenous following its construction after its earlier destruction in 1772. This implies that compared to much older settlements along the trade routes of the wider region, it shows less architectural references to cultural exchanges than cities which look back at millennia of trade exchanges along these trade routes.

The ICOMOS Panel explored the relationship between Sheki's urban typology and sericulture but noted, as also confirmed by the State Party, that there is limited correlation between these aspects and hence Sheki as a historic city could not be said an exceptional testimony of sericulture.

In terms of authenticity, the ICOMOS Panel expressed concerns regarding the state of conservation of the city, the reduced overall percentage of historic material and substance dating back to its key era of trade relations and the methodology with which restoration activities were undertaken in the past, reducing the material authenticity of the property. It further noted that some past repair works not only affected the authenticity of the structures but also their capacity to withstand potential future seismic activities. The ICOMOS Panel therefore concluded that Historic Sheki with the Khan's Palace did not demonstrate the qualifying condition of authenticity as required by the Operational Guidelines.

Likewise, the ICOMOS Panel considered the condition of integrity affected by the reduced percentage of preserved architectural structures. In addition, developments of the 20th and 21st century, such as hotel developments in the historic centre, at times in rather prominent locations and not respecting the surrounding volumes and proportions, reduced the ability of the property to be considered complete and free of current development threats. The ICOMOS Panel concluded that also the qualifying condition of integrity is not demonstrated.

In conclusion, the ICOMOS Panel considered that for the above combination of reasons the property could not be said to have the capacity to demonstrate Outstanding Universal Value. In the spirit of fostering dialogue, should the State Party consider that further explanations are required in relation to this conclusion, we would kindly request you to contact the ICOMOS Evaluation Unit to arrange a meeting. We do, however, respectfully remind you that the recommendation of the ICOMOS Panel cannot now be changed.

While discussing possible ways of future cooperation with the State Party of Azerbaijan in order to strengthen its representation on the World Heritage list, the ICOMOS Panel noted that the Tentative List of Azerbaijan has not been updated since 2001. It therefore suggested that ICOMOS would be interested in assisting the State Party during a review process aimed at identifying heritage sites, which may have strong potential for demonstrating Outstanding Universal Value.

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 Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Azerbaijan
 UNESCO World Heritage Centre