

# 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/1587/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 21 December 2018

H. E. Mr Yong CHANTHALANGSY  
Permanent Delegation of the Lao People's  
Democratic Republic to UNESCO  
Ambassade de la République démocratique  
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World Heritage List 2019

**Megalithic Jar Sites in Xiengkhuang – Plain of Jars (Lao People's Democratic Republic) –  
Interim report and additional information request**

Dear Ambassador,

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 2019. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to "Megalithic Jar Sites in Xiengkhuang – Plain of Jars" was carried out by Christophe Sand (New Caledonia) in October 2018. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organization and implementation of the mission.

On 9 October 2018, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the selection of components, the disaster risk management, the Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA), the proposed developments, the community awareness and involvement, the interpretation of the Jar Sites, the tourism management plan, and the monitoring. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 7 November 2018 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2018, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2019. 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 2019.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on Friday 23 November 2018 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the discussions at the ICOMOS Panel meeting. Following the completion of their deliberations, the ICOMOS Panel has identified areas where it considers further information is needed.

Therefore, we would be pleased if the State Party could consider the following points:

### **Selection of components**

The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention require the components of serial properties to be explicitly justified in relation to the proposed Outstanding Universal Value. The Additional Information that was provided in November 2018 has assisted ICOMOS, but at this stage, the rationale for including the key sites with jars: sites 1, 2, 42, 52 and parts of 3 (3-1, 3-2, 3-4), and quarry sites 8 and 21 seems clear; however, the rationale for the others (3-3, 3-5, 3-7, 12, 23, 25 and 28) is less so. Reducing the overall series could possibly have practical advantages for the management of the nominated property (since some of the components that are queried represent the furthest components to the north and/or east of the overall group). The ICOMOS Panel would appreciate further advice about the necessity of including these components in relation to the proposed justification for Outstanding Universal Value.

### **Management System**

The ICOMOS Panel was very interested to learn about the active role of the villages in maintaining and managing the nominated components. Overall, the management system seems to rely on a combination of such arrangements, together with the Action Plan and the legal frameworks. For this reason – and given that the nominated property includes components that span a large area of the Xiengkhuang Province – the ICOMOS Panel would be pleased to receive additional information on whether a Management Plan could be established for the nominated serial property in order to provide a stronger coordination of the overall strategic vision for the serial property. The future possibility for this, an outline of the content of the Management Plan, and the likely timeframe would be useful.

### **Future Development Plans**

Additional information is requested to clarify all future development plans inside the nominated components or within the Buffer Zones. For example, a 'restoration' project at Site 1 was briefly discussed with the ICOMOS mission expert, but is not detailed in the Nomination dossier. The ICOMOS Panel would be interested to fully understand the scope of all such plans, and whether they have been subject to Heritage Impact Assessment.

### **Research and Interpretation**

A characteristic of this nomination is that relatively little is known about the peoples that made and initially used the jars, and there has been relatively little archaeological research. Accordingly, the interpretation of the serial property relies on information which to some extent, are not based on scientific evidence but on the concept of "mystery", which is a narrow basis for its presentation in the longer-term. The ICOMOS Panel is aware of the recently initiated research project involving Lao, Australian and New Zealand archaeologists, and would be pleased if the State Party could provide additional information on the longer-term research plans to improve the state of knowledge.

The ICOMOS Panel would be also pleased to receive additional information about future plans to deepen the interpretation of the nominated property on the basis of the archaeological research.

### **Maps**

The ICOMOS mission identified some errors and omissions in the mapping of components which should be corrected, including: the location of jars and the boundary of Site 25, and the location of group 4 on the map for Site 23. The different land tenures for Site 1 should also be mapped (indicating the plots in private ownership).

More importantly, the ICOMOS Panel considers that the mapping of the components should be further enhanced in order to provide a basis for their long-term protection and management. The component maps should show all relevant attributes, including the jars and other archaeological sites (especially in sites 1 and 2), as well as visitor facilities, tracks and other features. The ICOMOS Panel acknowledges that while essential to good management, this could be a longer-term objective, and would be interested to know if this is planned, and the likely timetable.

## UXO Clearance

The ICOMOS Panel appreciates the updated information provided about the completion of UXO clearance at all nominated components and Buffer Zones. It is understood that UXO clearance in areas beyond the Buffer Zones is continuing. No further information is sought at this stage about the UXO clearing processes; however, it may be that the small white concrete markers used to delineate safe paths for movement within the sites could be eventually removed. The ICOMOS Panel would be interested to receive, if available, additional information concerning the longer term plans about these markers.

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 2019 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,

Paula

Gwenaëlle Bourdin  
Director  
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to Department of Heritage, Ministry of Information, Culture & Tourism  
UNESCO World Heritage Centre