STATE OF CONSERVATION REPORT BY THE STATE PARTY (UZBEKISTAN)
WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTY: “SAMARKAND – CROSSROAD OF CULTURES”

(in compliance with Paragraph 169 of the Operational Guidelines)

Samarkand – Crossroad of Culture (Uzbekistan) (C 603 rev)

“Samarkand – Crossroad of Cultures” was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2001 according to criteria (i), (ii) and (iv). The Retrospective Statement of Outstanding Universal Value of the property was adopted in 2012.

The property is under the State protection, more specifically under the responsibility of the Samarkand Regional Department for Cultural Heritage of the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in cooperation with the State Committee for Architecture.

The local and provincial administration of Samarkand, together with the Department of Cultural Heritage of Samarkand and Dzizzak Region, have prepared this State of Conservation report to provide updated information about the property and acknowledge progress in the implementation of the Decision 43 COM 7B.77 of 2019 (Baku, Azerbaijan), for examination by the World Heritage Committee at its 44th session in 2020. The State of Conservation report was required by World Heritage Committee, Decision 43 COM 7B.77, point 10.

1. Executive Summary

Samarkand city is going through an important urban regeneration process, aimed at the improvement of the residents’ quality of life, supporting economic development and ensuring a healthy environment, while placing culture, and in particular heritage conservation, within the larger development planning framework.

The draft of the new Master Plan, prepared by Tashkent Planning Institute together with a wide range of stakeholders including city and provincial authorities, the Regional Department for Cultural Heritage, experts and communities, is close to completion. This plan, which embraces the Historic Urban Landscape approach, integrates the goals of social and economic development with the goals of urban heritage conservation and strikes to establish a balanced and sustainable relationship between the built and natural environment. The final draft, together with the new traffic scheme, will be submitted to the World Heritage Committee for review by ICOMOS, before approval.

Thanks to a strong political support, the recent important efforts made to preserve the city’s urban heritage while making Samarkand a more attractive and sustainable city have been continued and intensified:

a) On 24 August 2019, a law “On amendments and additions to some legislative acts of the republic of Uzbekistan concerning the enhanced protection of objects of the material cultural heritage” has been approved. The law envisages increased responsibility and liability for violation of rules for the protection and use of tangible cultural heritage, not only for deliberate destruction, but also for negligence that caused significant damage.

b) The inventory aimed at updating the list of protected buildings, has been completed. The identified objects, situated on the territory of the property and buffer zones, have been included in the Project of Detailed Planning (PDP) of the draft Master Plan of Samarkand.

c) The “Development Control of the Historic Center of Samarkand and its Buffer Zones”, prepared by Tashkent Urban Planning Institute, together with local heritage experts, is still under preparation.
d) The preparation of the Management Plan, which follows the holistic approach of the 2011 Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL), is in progress. Its aim is double: the protection and conservation of the World Heritage property, but also its sustainable development. The assessments are already completed, and an overall vision, objectives and actions have been drafted together with the stakeholder group during workshops, meetings, and interviews. The draft plan of actions is now being discussed with the communities living in the concerned mahallas. A first draft of this plan will be available in February this year.

e) The digital model of the World Heritage property and its buffer zone (orthophotomap), has been completed.

f) The proposal for creating a network of pedestrian streets, together with streetscape improvement schemes including stone paving and landscaping, has been completed.

g) The “Tashkent Urban Planning Institute”, together with local experts reviewed and expanded the actual boundaries of the buffer zone and proposed new boundaries in order to correct the errors and omissions found in the minor modification of boundaries approved in 2016. The request will be submitted to the World Heritage Centre as soon as further in-depth studies and expert consultation will confirm the above-mentioned proposal.

Regarding the development projects related to Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) international summit, the Samarkand government decided to create a touristic zone far away from the historic centre and its buffer zone - along the Samarkand rowing canal - grouping all the hotel facilities that were initially proposed to be located in areas requiring the demolition of existing mahallas (or parts thereof) within the property, buffer zone and outside the buffer zone.

The multifunctional project “Samarkand City” Tourist Zone – initially planned to be built on Amir Timur street, right outside the boundaries of the property – will be also built at this remote area of the rowing canal. The unbuilt land at the initial location on Amir Timur street will be used for a low-rise hotel development, but no investor manifested interest for this project yet.

Only four projects, involving redevelopment, reuse or refurbishment of existing properties – without requiring any demolition or relocation of residents - have been pursued on the territory of the World Heritage property:

(1) the development of a new In Tourist hotel in lieu of the former 11-storey hotel, which was in bad structural condition and whose important height had adverse visual effects on the historic urban landscape. The proposed development is not higher than the neighboring historic building of the Department of Biology of the Samarkand State University;

(2) the re-use of the existing stand-up structure of a former factory on University Boulevard; and

(3) the refurbishment of two existing hotels involving minor modification of façades but no modification of footprint or height (“President” and “Afrosyab” hotels).

For the above hotel facilities, drawings have been completed and submitted to the World Heritage Centre for review by ICOMOS or discussed with the Reactive Monitoring Mission.

The Hilton hotel located on Ibn Sina boulevard, on a former industrial site, outside the current buffer zone, and outside visual cones, is under construction. Based on prior consultation of topographic map, context analysis and visual examination, the Design Guidelines produced for priority projects related to SCO Summit established that a building at this location would not adversely impact the OUV of the property, provided that the maximum height, alignment, and scale are respected.
The limited resources, both human and financial, of the Samarkand Regional Department for Cultural Heritage remain a concern, especially the limited number and capacity of staff. The Samarkand Regional Department for Cultural Heritage needs to be strengthened. According to the Presidential Order of 19 December 2018, its human, financial, and technical resources shall be enhanced, but these measures have not been implemented yet.

Finally, the need for capacity-building in heritage conservation for decision-makers, architects, planners, engineers and craftmen constitutes a critical challenge. The assistance of the World Heritage Centre and Advisory Bodies in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

2. Response to the Decision 43 COM 7B.77 of the World Heritage Committee

Since the submission of the last State of Conservation report of March 2019, which addresses the recommendations of the World Heritage Committee Decision 42COM 7B.77 of 2018, much progress has been made, as follows:

5. [...] recommends that the Master Plan and the Management Plan be integrated following the approach of the 2011 UNESCO Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL);

The draft Master Plan, prepared through a participatory planning method, is close to completion and will be released for public consultation in the first trimester of 2020. The draft master Plan follows the holistic landscape approach and principles of the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL). This plan integrates the goals of urban conservation to those of socio-economic development. Conjointly, a multidisciplinary team of planners from Tashkent Research and Design Institute for Urban Planning, local conservation architects and experts, is currently working on the integration of the draft Management Plan with the draft Master Plan, following the HUL approach.

The Master Plan considered both built and natural environment; therefore, the protection of biodiversity and the old system of irrigation canals are taken into consideration. Measures have been taken to open up the canals that were built up and rehabilitate the canals that were clogged or damaged, and to landscape their surroundings; specific protection perimeters (no-build areas) have been created around them, their size varying according to the canal width.

The heritage objects located outside the buffer zone are provided with special protection perimeters to control their setting.

The wider setting of the property has been taken into account and subsequently new buffer zone boundaries have been drafted to provide a better protection of the property's OUV, as follows:

- extension in the northern part, taking into account the topography, the main views, the archaeological layers (ancient external fortification walls) and intangible heritage; the sacred hill of Chupan-Ata and its 15th century mausoleum, an ancient pilgrim site, as well as the landscape area of Obi-Rakhmad, testimony of collective memory of Samarkandis, for its ancient mills lining the canal, and the famous Samarkand bread that used to be made there, are also included;
- inclusion of two very important monuments (religious complexes and their cemeteries) which are listed in the Nomination Dossier and did not appear on the map approved in 2016 (Khodja Abdi-Biroun and Khodja Akhrar Valli);
- correction of other errors in the current buffer zone (Namazgoh mosque was not indicated at the right place, but more to the South), so the southern limits of the Buffer Zone has been modified accordingly.