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/1619/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 20 December 2019

H. E. Mr Ibrahim Albalawi
Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to UNESCO
Maison de l'UNESCO
1, rue Miollis
75732 Paris CEDEX 15

World Heritage List 2020
Cultural Rock Arts in Hima Najran (Saudi Arabia) – 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 2020. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to "Cultural Rock Arts in Hima Rock Art" was carried out by Mr. Benjamin Smith (Australia) in September 2019. 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 24 September 2019, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding justification for inscription, integrity and authenticity, factors affecting the property, boundaries, conservation, protection and management, interpretation, presentation and visitors' management. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 10 October 2019 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

In mid-November 2019, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2020. 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 2020.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on Friday 22 November 2019 with representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchange during this meeting was of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS evaluation meeting in which the Panel identified areas where it considers further information is needed.

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

Documentation
ICOMOS appreciates the information provided in the nomination dossier in relation to the sites located within the nominated area. However, little information was provided on the sites located in the buffer zone and the wider area. Due to this lack of information, it appears quite difficult to understand the whole property without having the full picture of the rock art sites identified in the Region within the framework of this nomination. Could the State Party provide a map showing the precise location of the 551 heritage sites reported from the nominated areas and the buffer zone?

In addition, it was noticed that Annex 3 mentioned in the nomination dossier as "*List of rock art and rock inscription sites in the Cultural Rock Arts in Ḥimā Najrān and nearby*" is not included into the nomination dossier. Could the State Party provide ICOMOS with this missing annex?

During the meeting with the State Party, ICOMOS understood that an inventory of rock art sites does exist but its digitalization has not been yet completed and a database is to be developed. Could the State Party submit to ICOMOS information on the structure of this database, together with a template of the data sheet and a few examples of data sheets for sites located within the property boundaries and buffer zone? ICOMOS would also be pleased if the State Party could provide a detailed calendar for its completion.

Name of the property
ICOMOS notices that despite the impressive number of petroglyphs and inscriptions, there is also important archaeological potential within the nominated area and buffer zone. ICOMOS considers that the current name of the nominated property "Cultural Rock Arts in Hima Najran" could be seen restrictive due to the different types of identified attributes and archaeological potential. Therefore, ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could consider changing the name of the property for 'Hima Najran'.

Comparative analysis
As presented in the nomination dossier, the comparative analysis appears too broad and not focused enough on the justification for inscription of the proposed series. ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could consider the revision of the comparative analysis by narrowing it towards comparisons within its geo-cultural framework, by focusing especially on the region and comparisons within Saudi Arabia. In particular, ICOMOS would welcome comparisons with the already inscribed property "Rock Art of Hail Region of Saudi Arabia" (2015, (i) and (iii)), in order to understand how the nominated property differs from this site. In addition, internal comparisons within the region would help to better understand the current selection of sites within the series, in terms of sites that are located within the nominated components and the ones that are located within the buffer zone and/or the wider area.

Boundaries
Could the State Party submit to ICOMOS a timeframe for the inclusion of Jabal Kawbab and part of Jabal Qara within the buffer zone?

ICOMOS finds the concept of dividing the buffer zone into developed and undeveloped zones difficult to understand, particularly in relation to the village of Hima and its potential development in close range to the Hima wells, petroglyphs and inscriptions (component parts 1 and 2 of the nominated property). The plans for "*Najd Khayran site to be developed as a tourism destination*" as indicated in the additional information, does not appear to follow the rationale of the State Party in terms of divisions within the buffer zone, as it is located in the undeveloped zone within the buffer zone. Could the State Party provide clarifications in relation to the nature of developments that are permitted, and those which are forbidden, depending on the defined zoning into the buffer zone?

Conservation and monitoring
Three conservation issues have been identified as affecting the nominated property and the buffer zone, namely graffiti, bullet damage and garbage. ICOMOS understands that the sites within the nominated property are protected by fencing. However, it is not clear how the sites within the buffer zone are protected and monitored from these threats. ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could provide information on this issue.

ICOMOS would be interested to know if the State Party is willing to address the above ground walling for the wells and the water channels, which are recent structures that require a careful and informed reconstruction based on historic research.

ICOMOS notes that the proposed monitoring system is based on monitoring stations, which are not yet established. Could the State Party give a timeframe for establishing the monitoring stations and also for the initiation of the monitoring program, which would only be possible after the completion of the geo-database and the availability of site records for all sites within the nominated property and the buffer zone?

ICOMOS would like to know the timeframe for SCTH to recruit specialized staff, in their Najran offices and in the nominated property, with knowledge and expertise in the fields of archaeology, heritage management and rock art conservation.

Protection
Could the State Party clarify whether the hima traditional system for protection and management is practiced by the local Bedouin tribes and if there is an opportunity to include this system within the management plan for the nominated property and the buffer zone?

ICOMOS Panel notes that six component parts of the property are protected by fencing and controlled accessibility. Could the State Party clarify the strategy for protection of sites within the buffer zone in the light of the plans to develop tourism accessibility as expressed in the tourism management plan?

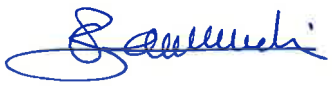
ICOMOS notes a discrepancy between the management plan and the tourism management plan. While the management plan adopts the limitation of access to certain important sites, the tourism management plan proposes potential routes for guided tours along sites, using 4x4 vehicles. Could the State Party clarify this issue?

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 2020 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
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ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to Saudi Commission for Tourism and National Heritage (SCTH)
UNESCO World Heritage Centre