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Организация  
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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

# World Heritage

# 23 GA

**WHC/21/23.GA/INF.4**

Paris, 27 October 2021

Original: English

## UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

### TWENTY-THIRD SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF STATES PARTIES TO THE CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

Paris, UNESCO Headquarters  
November 2021

**Item 4 of the Provisional Agenda: Report of the Chairperson of the World Heritage Committee on the activities of the World Heritage Committee**

**INF.4: Follow up to Decision 44 COM 8 - Reflection on sites associated with memories of recent conflicts**

#### SUMMARY

This document is presented in conformity with Decision **44 COM 8**, by which the World Heritage Committee requested to keep the General Assembly informed about the ongoing reflection on sites of memories of recent conflicts.

## I. BACKGROUND

1. In view of the increasing number of nominations submitted or under preparation related to sites associated with memories of recent conflicts, the World Heritage Committee, at its 42nd session (Manama, 2018), decided to launch a comprehensive reflection on sites associated with memories of recent conflicts (Decisions **42 COM 5A**, **42 COM 8B.24** and **42 COM 8**).
2. By Decision **42 COM 5A** the World Heritage Committee, noting the discussion paper by ICOMOS on Evaluations of World Heritage Nominations related to Sites Associated with Memories of Recent Conflicts, decided to convene an Expert Meeting on sites associated with memories of recent conflicts to allow for both philosophical and practical reflections on the nature of memorialization, the value of evolving memories, the inter-relationship between material and immaterial attributes in relation to memory, and the issue of stakeholder consultation, and to develop guidance on whether and how these sites might relate to the purpose and scope of the World Heritage Convention.
3. By Decision **42 COM 8B.24** (Manama, 2018), while recalling the reservations it has expressed concerning the inscription of sites related to negative memories, the World Heritage Committee decided to adjourn consideration of the nomination of the Funerary and Memorial sites of the First World War (Western Front), Belgium and France, until a comprehensive reflection has taken place and the World Heritage Committee at its 44th session has discussed and decided whether and how sites associated with recent conflicts and other negative and divisive memories might relate to the purpose and scope of the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines (as also indicated in Decision **42 COM 8**). In the same decision the Committee noted that the nomination of the Funerary and Memorial sites of the First World War (Western Front), could only be considered by the Committee upon further review by the Advisory Bodies in light of the Committee decision referred to above and upon receipt of additional information to be provided by the States Parties concerned. It should be noted that, in addition, there are currently three other nominations, which were already submitted and considered complete, but whose evaluation is pending the conclusion of the reflection. These are: The Landing Beaches, Normandy, 1944 (France), Brâncuși Monumental Ensemble of Târgu Jiu (Romania) and the Genocide Memorial Sites: Nyamata, Murambi, Gisozi and Bisesero (Rwanda).
4. In conformity with Decision **42 COM 5A**, an expert meeting was organized in Paris from 4 to 6 December 2019 (see Document WHC/21/44.COM/INF.8.1) by the Secretariat thanks to the financial support of the governments of Australia, France, Kuwait, Republic of Korea and UNESCO, as well as in-kind support from the African World Heritage Fund. The meeting brought together 29 experts from different constituencies and backgrounds from all regions of the world, including representatives of the Advisory Bodies, UNESCO Category 2 Centres, World Heritage Centre as well as the Communication and Information Sector, Education Sector and Science Sector of UNESCO. Ms Isabelle Longuet (France) was chosen as Chairperson of the meeting and Ms Eugene Jo (ICCROM), as Rapporteur.
5. In addition to the expert meeting, the reflection was enriched by an independent study on sites associated with recent conflicts and other negative and divisive memories, which was prepared at the request of the World Heritage Centre, with the financial support of the Republic of Korea. This study benefitted from the discussions of the expert meeting in December 2019 and further review by some members of the expert group. The study draws on background documents and relevant studies related to sites of recent conflicts and the use of World Heritage inscription criterion (vi), as well as literature related to public history and memorialization. The study was presented to the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee as Document WHC/21/44.COM/INF.8.2.

6. Additionally, ICOMOS prepared a second discussion paper on “Sites associated with memories of Recent Conflicts and the World Heritage Convention”. Encouraged by the World Heritage Committee to further deepen its analysis and broaden the participation of experts in this new reflection, ICOMOS’ second discussion paper considers the purpose and scope of the World Heritage Convention, as well as its key concepts, and how sites associated with memories of recent conflicts relate to these. It has been prepared on the basis of extensive consultation, with ICOMOS National Committees and International Scientific Committees, but also with several international experts, from all regions of the world, which together reflected a wide variety of expertise. The updated ICOMOS Paper is available at the following web link: <https://whc.unesco.org/en/memoryreflection>.
7. At its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/Online, 2021), the World Heritage Committee expressed its appreciation for the work of experts from all regions that participated in the meeting in Paris, and to the experts who prepared the independent study, the Advisory Bodies and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre for their work on the reflection on sites associated with recent conflicts. The Committee also took note of the meeting of the African experts and the Inter-Ministerial meeting hosted by South Africa, in April 2021.
8. While taking note of the outcomes of the detailed reflection process in which some experts considered that sites associated with recent conflicts do not relate to the purpose and scope of the World Heritage Convention and its Operational Guidelines and of the suggestion that sites associated with memories of recent conflicts, which may not demonstrate the Outstanding Universal Value, could be considered by other international fora, the Committee acknowledged the persistent divergent views on the subject of the reflection.
9. A drafting group was convened in an attempt to facilitate a decision as to whether the reflection should remain within the framework of the Committee, or whether it should rather report its results to the General Assembly of the States Parties. However, the drafting group did not reach an agreement on the approach to be adopted.
10. Consequently, the Committee decided to establish an open-ended working group of States Parties to the Convention (Decision **44 COM 8**), “in order to broaden the scope of the reflection on sites of memories of recent conflicts, accommodating other views not currently reflected in the existing reports, and to consider whether and how the “sites associated with recent conflicts” relate to the purpose and scope of the World Heritage Convention”. An inception meeting of this open-ended working group will be held beginning of November 2021 and a final report will be presented for consideration at the 45th session of the World Heritage Committee.