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منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
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# World Heritage

# 23 GA

**WHC/21/23.GA/11**

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## 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 11 of the Provisional Agenda: Updating of the Policy Document on  
climate action for World Heritage**

#### SUMMARY

This document presents a detailed overview of the process followed for the updating of the 2007 Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on World Heritage properties, as well as a summary of the comments received from Committee members, as requested by the World Heritage Committee at its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021) (Decision **44 COM 7C**).

This document is to be read in conjunction with WHC/21/23.GA/INF.11, which contains the draft revised Policy Document.

**Draft Resolution: 23 GA 11, see Point III.**

## I. BACKGROUND

1. Climate change has become one of the most significant threats to World Heritage properties, potentially impacting their Outstanding Universal Value, including their integrity and authenticity, and their potential for economic and social development at the local level.
2. The issue of the impacts of climate change on World Heritage was brought to the attention of the World Heritage Committee in 2005 by a group of concerned organizations and individuals. Subsequently, UNESCO has been at the forefront of exploring and managing the impacts of climate change on World Heritage. In 2006, under the guidance of the World Heritage Committee, and along with the World Heritage Committee's Advisory Bodies (ICCRROM, ICOMOS, IUCN) and a broad working group of experts, UNESCO prepared a report on 'Predicting and Managing the effects of climate change on World Heritage', as well as a 'Strategy to Assist States Parties to the Convention to Implement Appropriate Management Responses'. This was followed by a compilation of case studies on climate change and World Heritage. This process led to the adoption in 2007 by the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention of a Policy Document on the impacts of climate change on World Heritage properties (hereafter called "Policy Document").
3. Since the adoption of the Policy Document, an important number of reports on the state of conservation of World Heritage properties affected by climate change have been presented to the World Heritage Committee. In 2017, the World Heritage Committee reiterated the importance of States Parties undertaking the most ambitious implementation of the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) by "*holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and by pursuing efforts to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change*".
4. Aware that knowledge related to adaptation and mitigation to climate change has drastically increased over the past 10 years, the World Heritage Committee requested at its 40th session (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016), the World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies to periodically review and update the Policy Document, to make available the most current knowledge and technology on the subject to guide the decisions and actions of the World Heritage community (Decision **40 COM 7**, para. 16).
5. An international expert workshop, funded by the German Federal Agency for Nature Conservation and organized in cooperation with IUCN, ICOMOS, ICCROM and the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, took place in October 2017 in Vilm, Germany, to discuss the challenges posed by climate change to the conservation and management of World Heritage properties. The meeting brought together international experts on heritage and climate change to discuss the revision of the 2007 "Policy Document" and to make recommendations to guide the updating process (see <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1736/>).
6. Subsequently, a project was initiated by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre to update the Policy Document for consideration by the World Heritage Committee at its extended 44th session and ensure its widespread communication and dissemination to all stakeholders concerned. This project was funded by the Netherlands Funds-in-Trust.
7. A wide online consultation of all stakeholders of the World Heritage Convention on the updating of the "Policy Document" was launched at the end of December 2019 until 31 January 2020. This questionnaire was widely circulated to all World Heritage stakeholders (see <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/2074/>). The full questionnaire is accessible at <https://whc.unesco.org/document/180635>. This consultation gathered 366

contributions and comments from key World Heritage stakeholders of the Convention on this crucial matter, which mostly highlighted a number of key challenges faced in properly implementing the 2007 Policy Document, as well as some gaps in this Policy Document, which should be addressed in its updated version (see summary of all responses at <https://whc.unesco.org/document/181913>).

8. A Technical Advisory Group of experts in the fields of natural and cultural heritage, climate change, with a sound understanding of the processes of the Convention, was established by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre with the main objectives to review the draft updated Policy Document and provide inputs. The Chairpersons of all six UNESCO Electoral Groups were consulted and invited to nominate two regional representatives and up to two observers to be part of this Technical Advisory Group. In addition to this diverse representation of States Parties, this geographically and gender-balanced group also included representatives of the three Advisory Bodies and the Secretariat.
9. The Technical Advisory Group defined a clear roadmap for the presentation of the updated Policy Document to the World Heritage Committee and met online several times in the course of 2020. During its meetings, the Technical Advisory Group addressed the crucial issues of the purpose and the scope of the updated Policy Document, its structure, as well as the means to ensure its proper implementation by all stakeholders of the Convention, and particularly focused its attention on several necessities/needs, such as to ensure that the updated Policy Document be fully anchored in the World Heritage system, and within the remit of the World Heritage Convention, to ensure clear links with the UN Agenda 2030, the SDGs, the Paris Agreement and with all other relevant World Heritage documents, to highlight the importance of education and capacity-building, and to have an action-oriented updated Policy Document, which clearly identifies the actors and their roles and responsibilities (Committee-level, national-level, site-level).
10. The updated Policy Document on climate action for World Heritage was then presented to the World Heritage Committee at its extended 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021), which endorsed it, and requested that the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, in consultation with the Advisory Bodies, revise it by incorporating views expressed and amendments submitted during the extended 44th session, and to consult World Heritage Committee members, especially concerning the following points:
  - the fundamental principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC), which is one of the basic pillars of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC),
  - the alignment of climate change mitigation actions with the CBDR-RC and the Nationally Determined Contributions accepted under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, except on an entirely voluntary basis,
  - the need for support and capacity-building assistance, as well as the encouragement of technology transfer and financing from developed to developing countries.
11. The World Heritage Committee also requested that the updated draft Policy Document be transmitted for review and adoption at the 23rd session of the General Assembly of States Parties to the World Heritage Convention, in November 2021 (Decision **44 COM 7C**).

## II. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE WORLD HERITAGE COMMITTEE

12. By Circular Letter CL/WHC-21/03 of 4 August 2021, States Parties members of the World Heritage Committee were invited to provide inputs and concrete proposals on the three specific points raised in Decision **44 COM 7C**, by 15 September 2021, to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. A reminder was sent to all Committee members on 2 September 2021.
13. By the deadline of 15 September 2021, eight States Parties had provided comments on the above, but also comments of a general nature or more specific, notably on the purpose and scope of the Policy Document, its implementation, its revision, as well as on good practice examples, management and monitoring of World Heritage properties, *inter alia*. Concrete inputs in the form of amendments to the draft Policy Document have also been submitted. All comments and inputs received have been consolidated and reflected in Document WHC/21/23.GA/INF.11 (with indication of the submitting State Party), together with the response by the UNESCO World Heritage Centre and the Advisory Bodies to guide the discussion during the General Assembly. The following presents a summary of the comments received on the various topics:

### **Principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC)**

14. While States Parties generally agree that the principle of CBDR-RC is a basic pillar of the international environmental regime, some recall that it is a principle in the UNFCCC, but not part of the Paris Agreement, and are of the view that any reference to CBDR-RC in the Policy Document should be strictly limited to mitigation actions (Nationally Determined Contributions - NDCs) in the context of the Paris Agreement and should not be referenced more broadly in relation to the UNFCCC, nor should it be connected to other matters, such as adaptation or finance.
15. On the other hand, it was indicated that since all States Parties to the World Heritage Convention are equally responsible for the management and conservation of the World Heritage properties located on their territories, and since the provisions set out in the Operational Guidelines apply equally to all parties, no specific reference to CBDR-RC should be included in the Policy Document.
16. Concrete proposals to integrate the principle of CBDR-RC have been proposed as part of the Guiding Principles to *adopt a precautionary approach aimed at minimising the risks associated with climate change* and to *promote global partnership, inclusion and solidarity*, in Section I.C of the Policy Document.

### **Alignment of climate change mitigation actions with the CBDR-RC and the Nationally Determined Contributions accepted under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, except on an entirely voluntary basis,**

17. A State Party recalls the importance to stress that the drafting of the updated Policy Document has been done in full recognition of the principles of the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, and their centrality as the privileged forum to discuss climate-related international issues.
18. There are however diverging views regarding the recognition of the Paris Agreement as an independent legal agreement. In some contributions, the current references to the Paris Agreement as an independent agreement in the Policy Document are found satisfactory and not to be modified, while others suggest language clarifications regarding the Paris Agreement, such as “adopted under the UNFCCC” or “the UNFCCC Paris Agreement”.
19. Regarding the alignment of climate change mitigation actions with the CBDR-RC and the NDCs, some contributing Committee members are of the view that any reference to

CBDR-RC in the Policy Document should be strictly limited to mitigation actions (NDCs) in the context of the Paris Agreement.

20. Concrete proposals in this regard have been formulated, notably as part of the World Heritage Climate Action Goal 3 (climate mitigation) in Section II.B of the Policy Document.

**Need for support and capacity-building assistance, as well as encouragement of technology transfer and financing from developed to developing countries.**

21. This aspect has drawn a number of comments and inputs from contributing Committee members, highlighting the need for such support and capacity-building assistance, encouragement of technology transfer and financing from developed to developing countries and that this aspect could be further strengthened in the Policy Document.
22. However, while some contributors recall that “under the UNFCCC and its Paris Agreement”, this provision is an obligation of developed countries in relation to developing ones, some others do not wish that the CBDR-RC be brought up in this context.
23. Some contributions are also in favour to take into account the developed countries’ leading role in the provision and mobilization of financial resources in support of developing countries, and to emphasize more specifically Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) as vulnerable regions, under the Finance section of the Enabling conditions for the implementation of the Policy Document (Section III.A).
24. Other concrete proposals have been suggested as part of the Guiding Principles *to promote global partnership, inclusion and solidarity* (Section I.C) and under the World Heritage Climate Action Goal 4 (Knowledge sharing, capacity building and awareness) in Section II.B. In addition, a direct quote from Article 11 of the Paris Agreement on capacity building is suggested as an addition to Section II.D.4 dedicated to Knowledge Sharing, Capacity Building and Awareness.

**Other comments**

25. Regarding the purpose and scope of the Policy Document, it is recalled that it must maintain its explicit focus on safeguarding Outstanding Universal Value and on the role World Heritage can play, not only in managing the impacts of climate change on World Heritage but also in mitigating climate change. It is also recalled that the Policy Document should not encroach on the mandate of other conventions. In this sense, it is suggested that any text in the Policy Document that could be perceived as setting a benchmark for States Parties’ emissions reduction efforts should be removed (for example, the World Heritage Climate Action Goal 2 (on climate mitigation) in Section II.B, is deemed to exceed UNESCO’s mandate, by asking States Parties “to develop national robust climate adaptation framework” and should therefore be adjusted to only cover cultural and heritage sites). It is also suggested that the role of protected natural areas in adaptation, mitigation and resilience to the effects of climate change and the promotion of all the ecosystem services they provide be highlighted. A contribution also stresses the fact that the Policy Document should provide a *voluntary* outcome-oriented policy framework, and an amendment is proposed to that effect in Section I.B, under Purpose and Scope.
26. The need for World Heritage properties to be examples of good environmental practices, notably through the use of new environmentally friendly and low-emission technologies, is being frequently referred to in the contributions. It is also recommended to add “Good Practices”, either as a new Annex V or as a separate section in current Annexes II, III and IV.

27. Regarding greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, a contributor draws attention to the reference made to the various sources of GHG emissions (such as deforestation in Paragraph 3), asking that this part be deleted or that all sources of GHG emissions be added. In addition, it is suggested that the aim for “zero emissions” be replaced by “low GHG emissions”.
28. Contributions offer diverging views on the matter of local knowledge and traditional practice: some are of the opinion that “local knowledge and wisdom and traditional practice represent different knowledge system that are key source of information to inform mitigation and adaptation options needed to prepare communities for future climate risks”, while some others wish to delete the mention of the traditional knowledge and Indigenous science as climate technology with relevance to contemporary climate action, under Section II.A (Enabling conditions – Technological innovations).
29. Diverging views are also expressed with regard to the question of the inscription of a property on the List of World Heritage in Danger due to climate change-related impacts. On the one hand, a request is placed to ensure that the “significant legal and interpretive questions raised by climate change with respect to the Convention” be resolved and “clearly articulated in the Operational Guidelines”, and that “any decisions associated with these issues should be deferred until clarity and certainty can be provided to all States Parties”. Additions have been proposed in this sense under Section II.C (Legal framework). On the other hand, it is recalled that the “legal provisions of the Operational Guidelines are clear and should be taken into account with regard to the inclusion of sites on the Danger List for climatic causes”.
30. A number of contributions stress the issue of the implementation of the Policy Document after its adoption, asking for specific indicators for each World Heritage Climate Action Goal in addressing climate change, and suggesting that this Policy Document become part of the national policies to address and adapt to climate changes to ensure its implementation with regard to heritage and cultural sites. The updating of World Heritage site management plans to present a general approach to climate change is suggested as a way to facilitate the regular monitoring of the implementation of the Policy Document.
31. Lastly, the revision of the Policy Document is also mentioned in the contributions provided, highlighting the need to plan for a periodic review and update of the Policy Document, based on the understanding that World Heritage properties are affected by social, political, economic dynamics, as well as by the impacts of climate change.

### III. DRAFT RESOLUTION

#### **Draft Resolution: 23 GA 11**

*The General Assembly,*

1. *Having examined Documents WHC/21/23.GA/11 and WHC/21/23.GA/INF.11,*
2. *Recalling Decisions **40 COM 7**, **41 COM 7**, **42 COM 7**, **43 COM 7.2** and **44 COM 7C**, adopted respectively at the 40th (Istanbul/UNESCO, 2016), 41st (Krakow, 2017), 42nd (Manama, 2018), 43rd (Baku, 2019) and extended 44th (Fuzhou/online, 2021) sessions of the World Heritage Committee,*
3. *Thanking the State Party of the Netherlands for having funded the project to update the 2007 Policy Document on the impacts of Climate Change on World Heritage properties, and expressing its gratitude to all stakeholders of the World Heritage Convention who contributed to this process,*

4. *Noting the debate on this item that took place during the extended 44th session of the World Heritage Committee (Fuzhou/online, 2021), as well as the comments expressed by the Committee members on this draft through a written consultation process,*
5. *Noting that the World Heritage Committee has endorsed the draft "Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage", as presented in Annex 1 of Document WHC/21/44.COM/7C, at its 44th session (Fuzhou/online, 2021),*
6. *Adopts the revised "Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage", contained in Document WHC/21/23.GA/INF.11;*
7. *Encourages the States Parties, the World Heritage Centre, the Advisory Bodies and World Heritage-related Category 2 Centres to disseminate widely the "Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage" through appropriate means to the World Heritage community and the broader public, including in local languages, and to promote its implementation;*
8. *Recalls the World Heritage Committee's request to the World Heritage Centre, jointly with the Advisory Bodies to, within the available resources:*
  - a) *Elaborate proposals for specific changes to the Operational Guidelines necessary to translate the principles of this Policy Document into actual operational procedures, and to develop education and capacity-building initiatives to enable a wide implementation of this Policy Document,*
  - b) *Consider preparing a Guidance Document to facilitate effective implementation of, and support for, the actions, goals and targets of this Policy Document, which could include indicators and benchmarking tools for measuring and reporting progress towards achieving the World Heritage Climate Action Goals;*
9. *Calls on States Parties to support the above-mentioned activities through extrabudgetary funding;*
10. *Recommends that States Parties and all stakeholders of the Convention to integrate climate change mitigation and adaptation actions in risk preparedness policies and action plans, in order to protect the Outstanding Universal Value of all World Heritage properties, in line with the "Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage";*
11. *Also recommends that World Heritage-related Category 2 Centres and UNESCO Chairs prioritize issues related to the implementation of the "Policy Document on Climate Action for World Heritage" within their capacity-building and research initiatives;*
12. *Requests the World Heritage Centre to present to the General Assembly, at its 25th session, a report on the progress made in the implementation of the Policy Document and the above provisions.*