

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/EG/1375/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 20 December 2021

H. E. Mr Vishal V. Sharma
Ambassador, Permanent Delegate
Permanent Delegation of India to UNESCO
Maison de l'UNESCO
1, rue Miollis
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World Heritage List 2022

Santiniketan (India) – 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 2022. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation process.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to “Santiniketan” was carried out by Mr. Kai Weise (Nepal) from 24 to 28 October 2021. 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 2021, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the summary of revisions, comparative analysis, boundaries, legal protection, development pressures, community involvement and management system. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 1 November 2021 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2021, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2022. 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 2022.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation to the meeting held on 26 November 2021 with some representatives of the ICOMOS Panel. The exchanges during this meeting were of great help for the third part of the ICOMOS Panel meeting.

While the ICOMOS Panel considered that “Santiniketan” might have the potential to meet the requirements for Outstanding Universal Value, this has not yet been demonstrated.

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

Comparative analysis

The ICOMOS World Heritage Panel considers that there is still more work to be done on the comparative analysis to clearly establish the potential Outstanding Universal Value of Santiniketan. Considerable work has already been done to compare properties from the World Heritage List and Tentative Lists in many countries, but as the nomination dossier says, in most cases these are of limited relevance. Some Indian examples outside the World Heritage system have already been provided, but ICOMOS considers that there could be other centres of cultural, philosophical and spiritual exploration in the early 20th century – such as the Theosophical Society Adyar or the Ramakrishna Mission at Belur. ICOMOS would appreciate additional comparisons with relevant examples in India or the wider Asian region that flourished at the turn of the 20th century.

Furthermore, it would be appreciated if a succinct description can be provided about the State Party’s understanding of the characteristics of the Asian avant-garde and Indian or Asian modernism which are tangibly demonstrated at Santiniketan.

Evidence of interchange

In relation to the justification of criterion (ii), the nomination dossier offers information about the degree to which Tagore’s vision for Santiniketan drew influences and inspirations from Indian cultural and spiritual traditions as well as those from around the world, especially other parts of Asia. What is less clear at this point is the degree to which there is evidence that Tagore’s philosophies about Santiniketan had a corresponding tangible influence on other places in the world, contributing to a pan-Asian modernity (or indeed to Indian modernism).

In requesting this additional information, ICOMOS emphasises that it is looking for evidence of other places in the world that have been influenced in tangible ways by Santiniketan and/or Tagore’s vision in order to specifically understand how the significance of the nominated property transcends its obvious national importance.

Legal protection

ICOMOS appreciates the recently provided additional information on the Visva Bharati Act of 1951. It is understood that the State Party considers this to provide the needed protection to the potential World Heritage property. While noting that the Act aims to ensure the continuation of Tagore’s vision and the purposes of Santiniketan, ICOMOS considers this to be an unusual form of protection for a World Heritage property and would like to know if there is any possibility of augmenting this existing legal framework with national and/or State laws for heritage protection. If in the future, the University proposed to initiate developments that could be detrimental to the protection of the Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property, are there any *legal frameworks* in place that could ensure that these were subjected to approvals at the national level?

In the dialogue with State Party representatives, emphasis was placed on the operation of the Heritage Committee to ensure that the obligations arising from a potential World Heritage inscription are met. It would be appreciated if further information can be provided clarifying whether there is any legal basis for the establishment and/or operation of this mechanism. Furthermore, the dialogue with the State Party representatives emphasised the close cooperation of Visva Bharati and the Archaeological Survey of

India in relation to conservation projects. ICOMOS is interested to know if there is any legal basis for this cooperation.

Inventory and documentation

The nomination dossier describes and maps the 36 heritage buildings in detail, and photographs and measured drawings have been provided for these. However, the same level of documentation has not been provided for all potential attributes, such as the landscape, sculptures, murals, significant building interiors, open air pavilions and platforms, gardens and so on. ICOMOS would appreciate additional information about the documentation available, and a map and accompanying inventory information about these potential attributes.

ICOMOS appreciates the additional information provided about conservation projects completed at Santiniketan, and the involvement of the Archaeological Survey of India and INTACH. ICOMOS would appreciate the provision of additional information on whether conservation plans are developed as part of these projects, and whether there are such plans in place for each of the significant attributes of the nominated property. If this process is planned, please provide a description of the process and the likely timeframe for completion.

Buffer zone

ICOMOS understands the decision taken to reduce the formerly nominated property to a single bounded area, and to align the buffer zone with the campus boundary. In general, this appears to provide an improved and coherent basis for the management system. However, because of its irregular shape, it leaves some areas of the property with minimal buffering from intrusive developments potentially occurring within the wider setting. ICOMOS recognizes that a Protected Area has been designated for a large surrounding of the nominated property and its buffer zone but does not yet fully understand how it will provide protection for the setting of the nominated property, particularly in areas where the buffer zone is relatively narrow. A succinct explanation of how this protection is ensured would be appreciated.

Campus master plan

The nomination documents mention that a master plan could be developed for the campus, but this was not clearly confirmed in the recently provided additional information. Given that the wider campus area (buffer zone) needs to meet the present and future needs of the university, ICOMOS considers that this could form an important part of the management system. Please, could the State Party provide an update on whether the master plan will be developed, its scope and an approximate timeframe for completion.

Heritage Impact Assessment

ICOMOS would appreciate additional information about any formal processes in place for Heritage Impact Assessment. If this is not yet formally in place, please indicate if there are any plans to establish these processes, and the timeframe for inclusion in the management system.

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 2022 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 kindly ask to keep your 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
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to Archaeological Survey of India
 UNESCO World Heritage Centre