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CONVENTION CONCERNING THE PROTECTION OF THE
WORLD CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE

World Heritage Committee
Sixteenth session

Santa Fe, New Mexico, United States of America
7-14 December 1992

Item 14 of Provisional Agenda: Revision of the Operational
Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage
Convention

The members of the Committee may recall that the question of the revision of the Guidelines had been evoked several times during its previous sessions, particularly that concerning the procedure for including a property in the List of World Heritage in Danger and the criteria for inscribing landscapes on the World Heritage List. At its sixteenth session, in July 1992, the Bureau recommended that a working group be constituted to study all revisions to the Guidelines and to submit proposals for adoption by the Committee at its sixteenth session. Meanwhile, an exhaustive revision of the Guidelines cannot be carried out until the Committee has adopted the Strategy for the Future Implementation of the Convention, which is being presented to the Committee at its current session. Hence, it appeared preferable to constitute a working group next year, to integrate into the future Guidelines, elements which become necessary to reflect the Strategy.

In respect of the criteria for natural heritage, the Bureau recommended that their revision be finalized and submitted for adoption by the Committee during its current session. Consequently, the finalized version of natural heritage criteria is provided in Part A of this document. In Part B, a revision of paragraph 108 of the Guidelines concerning the placing of plaques commemorating the inscription of properties on the World Heritage List, is proposed. The proposed revision was submitted to the Bureau at its last session and is submitted to the Committee for adoption.

A. Natural Heritage Criteria

1. It is recalled that the Bureau, at its twelfth session in June 1988, while examining the nomination of the Lesbos Petrified Forest submitted by Greece, recognized that IUCN needed specialist advice to evaluate properties nominated under natural heritage criteria (i) (the earth's evolutionary history) and (ii) (on-going geological processes).
2. The Secretariat contacted UNESCO's International Geological Correlation Programme (IGCP) and the International Union for Geological Sciences (IUGS) to study this matter in depth. A consultant was engaged to prepare a preliminary global list of geological and fossil sites.
3. From 11 to 13 February 1991, the Secretariat convened a meeting of a Task Force comprising experts representing several disciplines of the geological sciences and a representative of the IUCN. The meeting aimed at improving the regional balance of the draft list of geological and fossil sites and reviewing the application of natural heritage criteria to geological and fossil sites. The experts reviewed the application of natural heritage criteria (i) and (ii), described under paragraph 36 (a) of the Operational Guidelines, to each site in the draft list. They found criterion (i) to be imprecise and that criterion (ii) reflected geological, biological and ecological phenomena. Therefore, the Task Force redefined criterion (i) to make it more precise and separated geological aspects of criterion (ii) to define two new criteria. The Task Force also proposed guidelines for assessing the scientific merit of geological and/or fossil sites.
4. In accordance with the recommendations made by the Task Force, the Secretariat submitted to the Bureau, at its fifteenth session held from 17 to 21 June 1991 at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, a revision of natural heritage criteria to include the following:
 - a) the revised version of criterion (i) as proposed by the Task Force;
 - b) two new criteria, proposed by the Task Force and reflecting only geological phenomena and processes;
 - c) revisions of current criteria (ii), (iii) and (iv), described under paragraph 36 (a) of the Operational Guidelines, to exclude references to geological phenomena and processes, and to interactions between

man and nature which were to be incorporated in a new cultural heritage criterion on cultural landscapes; and

- d) the guidelines proposed by the Task Force for assessing the scientific merit of geological and/or fossil sites.

5. The Bureau, at its fifteenth session, discussed the above proposals and was of the view that the revisions placed too much emphasis on geological phenomena which was the focus of three of the six criteria proposed. Hence, the Bureau recommended that a further revision of natural heritage criteria be undertaken so that individual criterion may separately reflect geological, biological, ecological and aesthetic phenomena. Subsequently, the Committee, at its last session held from 9 to 13 December 1991, in Carthage, Tunisia, requested the Secretariat to co-operate with IUGS, IUCN and other experts, to revise natural heritage criteria as recommended by the Bureau and modify conditions of integrity to submit draft proposals for the consideration of the Bureau in mid-1992.

6. Revisions to natural heritage criteria was one of the subjects discussed by participants at a workshop on the World Heritage Convention held from 18 to 19 February 1992, as part of the Fourth World Parks Congress convened in Venezuela, Caracas. The experts who participated, reviewed past experience in the application of natural heritage criteria in identifying, nominating and selecting World Heritage sites. They concluded that the criteria are not sufficiently precise and that the reference to man's interaction with nature (criterion (ii)) and exceptional combinations of natural and cultural elements (criterion (iii)) are inconsistent with the legal definition of natural heritage in Article 2 of the Convention. Furthermore, they were also of the view that the notion of biological diversity is not explicitly reflected in the definitions of existing criteria and is particularly overshadowed by emphasis on threatened species in criterion (iv). The experts suggested that in the future, operational guidelines, apart from including revised criteria and conditions of integrity, should also incorporate explanatory paragraphs regarding the application of criteria in evaluating nominated sites.

7. In the light of the recommendations of the Bureau and the Committee, and the observations of the participants of the workshop on the World Heritage Convention held during the Fourth World Parks Congress in Caracas, Venezuela, natural heritage criteria and conditions of integrity were revised further and the revisions were submitted to the Bureau at its sixteenth session held at UNESCO Headquarters, in Paris, (6-10 July 1992). The Bureau, expressed its satisfaction with the revisions proposed, but requested the World Heritage Centre to further refine the proposals, in the

light of the suggestions made by the members of the Bureau, UNESCO's Division of Geological Sciences and by specialists belonging to IUCN's CNPPA (Commission on National Parks and Protected Areas) network, and submit a final draft for consideration and adoption by the Committee. These suggestions have been included in the revised natural heritage criteria and the conditions of integrity proposed below (proposed revisions are in bold letters):

Sites nominated should therefore:

- (a)
 - (i) be outstanding examples representing major stages of earth's history, including the record of life, significant on-going geological processes in the development of landforms, or significant geomorphic or physiographic features; or
 - (ii) be outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals; or
 - (iii) contain superlative natural phenomena or areas of exceptional natural beauty and aesthetic importance; or
 - (iv) contain the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation;

and

- (b) also fulfil the following conditions of integrity
 - (i) The sites described in 36 (a) (i) should contain all or most of the key interrelated and interdependent elements in their natural relationships; for example an 'ice age' area should include the snow field, the glacier itself and samples of cutting patterns, deposition and colonization (striations, moraines, pioneer stages of plant succession etc.); in the case of volcanoes, the magmatic series should be complete and all or most of the varieties of effusive rocks and types of eruptions be represented.

- (ii) The sites described in 36 (a) (ii) should have sufficient size and contain the necessary elements to demonstrate the key aspects of processes that are essential for the long-term conservation of the ecosystems and the biological diversity they contain therein; for example an area of tropical rainforest should include a certain amount of variation in elevation above sea-level, changes in topography and soil types, river systems and naturally regenerating patches; similarly a coral reef should include adjacent ecosystems, both landward and seaward, which act as buffers regulating nutrient and sediment inputs into the reef.
- (iii) The sites described in 36 (a) (iii) should be of outstanding aesthetic value and include areas whose conservation is essential for the long-term maintenance of the beauty of the site; for example, a site whose scenic values depend on a waterfall, should also include adjacent catchment and downstream habitats whose conservation is linked to the maintenance of the aesthetic qualities of the site.
- (iv) The sites described in paragraph 36 (a) (iv) should contain habitats for maintaining the most diverse fauna and flora characteristic of the biogeographic provinces and ecosystems under consideration; for example, a tropical savannah area should include its unique assemblage of herbivores and plants which have co-evolved; an island ecosystem, should include habitats for the maintenance of the biological diversity endemic to it; where wide-ranging species which are threatened occur, sites should be large enough to include the most critical habitats (e.g. feeding, breeding, resting etc.) essential to ensure the survival of viable populations of those species; in the case of migratory species, seasonal breeding and nesting sites, and migratory routes, wherever they are located, should be adequately protected; international conventions, e.g. the Convention of Wetlands of International Importance Especially as Waterfowl Habitat (Ramsar Convention), for ensuring the protection of habitats of migratory species of waterfowl, and other multi- and bi-lateral agreements could provide this assurance.
- (v) All sites described in paragraph 36 (a) should have management plans. When a site does not have a management plan at the time when it is nominated for the consideration of the World Heritage

Committee, the State Party concerned should indicate when such a plan would become available and how it proposes to mobilize the resources required for the preparation and implementation of the plan. The State Party should also provide other document(s) (e.g. operational plans) which may guide the management of the site until such time when a management plan is finalized.

- (vi) The sites described in paragraph 36 (a) should have adequate long-term legislative, regulatory or institutional protection. They may coincide with or constitute parts of existing or proposed protected areas, such as national parks or biosphere reserves. While management of such existing or proposed protected area categories may concern itself with a variety of zones, the characteristics of all such zones may not satisfy criteria (paragraph 36 (a)) and the conditions of integrity described here; in the case of a biosphere reserve, for example, only the core zone may meet the criteria and the conditions of integrity, although other zones, i.e. buffer and transitional zones, would be important for the conservation of the biosphere reserve in its totality.
- (vii) Sites described in paragraph 36 (a) should be the most important sites for the conservation of biological diversity. Biological diversity, according to the new global Convention on Biological Diversity, means the variability among living organisms in terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part and includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems. Only those sites which are the most biologically diverse are likely to meet criteria (ii) and (iv) of paragraph 36 (a).

8. The Committee may wish to note that in order to maintain conformity with the legal definition of natural heritage in Article 2 of the Convention, all references to man's interaction with nature have been omitted from the revisions proposed above. However, the World Heritage Centre, together with ICOMOS and IUCN, convened a special meeting of experts to discuss the question of cultural landscapes, from 23 to 25 September 1992, in France. A report on the results of that meeting and its relevance to the elaboration of a new criterion on cultural landscapes will be submitted to the Committee.

9. Apart from the revision to natural heritage criteria and the conditions of integrity proposed in paragraph 7, the World Heritage Centre also proposes to include the following explanatory paragraphs, in the Operational Guidelines:

(i) The evaluation of whether or not individual sites nominated by States Parties satisfy the natural heritage criteria and the conditions of integrity is carried out by the World Conservation Union and will normally include:

Data assembly: Compilation of a standardized data sheet on the site using the nominated document and other sources. Information on sites that are comparable to the nominated site is reviewed in order to enable a comparative evaluation of the nominated site.

External review: The nomination is sent to experts knowledgeable about the site for comments.

Field Inspection: In most cases, missions are sent to evaluate the site and to discuss the nomination with national and local authorities.

Panel Review: A draft evaluation prepared on the basis of results obtained from the above three steps is reviewed by a panel of experts at IUCN Headquarters.

The evaluation report which is submitted to the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee, normally in mid-year, is an outcome of the four steps mentioned above. (See paragraph 55 of the Operational Guidelines (March 1992) for types of recommendations that the Bureau would make on nominations and the procedure which leads, by the end of the year, to decisions of the Committee on each nominated site.)

(ii) In principle, a site could be inscribed on the World Heritage List as long as it satisfies one of the four criteria and the relevant conditions of integrity. However, most inscribed sites have met two or more criteria. Nomination dossiers, IUCN evaluations and the final recommendations of the Committee on each inscribed site are available for consultation by States Parties which may wish to use such information as guides for identifying and elaborating the nomination of sites within their own territories.

10. The Committee is called upon to consider the revisions to natural heritage criteria, the conditions of integrity and the proposals for new explanatory paragraphs, and adopt them with modifications as it may find necessary.

B. Proposed Revision of Paragraph 108 of the Guidelines

11. Many of the properties inscribed on the World Heritage List do not display any particular signs, despite the much repeated wish expressed by the Committee, that these properties be identified by a commemorative plaque. At times when there is a plaque, UNESCO is not always mentioned, although the Convention was adopted by the General Conference and is implemented by UNESCO.

The Director-General wishes that this situation be improved and that the Committee examine this question. The revisions proposed below are aimed at streamlining the placing of World Heritage plaques. It is also proposed that after the Committee's approval of these modifications, the Secretariat address a circular letter to all States Parties to the Convention.

Revision of paragraph 108 of the Guidelines:

Add a first sentence:

"When a property is inscribed on the World Heritage List, the State Party shall, as far as possible, place a plaque to commemorate the inscription."

Revision of paragraph 109, second line:

"The name of UNESCO and the World Heritage symbol should appear on the plaque."