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Charenton-le-Pont, 21 December 2022

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Ambassador, Permanent Delegate
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World Heritage List 2023

Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas (India) – Interim report and additional information request

Dear Ambassador,

As prescribed by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies have to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2023. We are therefore pleased to provide you with the relevant information outlining issues related to the evaluation procedure.

The ICOMOS technical evaluation mission to the “Sacred Ensembles of the Hoysalas” was carried out by Mr. Ar. Tiong Kian Boon (Malaysia) in September 2022. The mission expert highly appreciated the availabilities and support provided by the experts in your country for the organisation and implementation of the mission.

On 3 October 2022, a letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information on the description of the property, the rationale for selecting the component temples, the boundaries, the enclosure walls of the Hoysalesvara temple and the Keshava temple, the integrity, monitoring indicators, and visitor management at the religious festival. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 7 November 2022 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2022, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2023. 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 2023.

We thank you for the availability of your Delegation for attending the meeting held on 26 November 2022 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. During the last part of its meeting, the Panel has identified areas where it considers that further information is needed.

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

Historical context

The ICOMOS Panel considers that the temple form of the Hoysala style was consciously created by the Hoysala rulers in the process of forging the national identity from a mountain chieftain to a major regional power against its culturally strong neighbouring kingdoms. The invention of the Hoysala Legend and the persistent patronising of art, architecture and literature are all parts of the same process. In a region where religion played an essential role in society, the functions of the temples were not just for fulfilling the need of local believers. The Hoysala style temples also served social and political purposes. ICOMOS considers that there is a need to better contextualise the religious and political backgrounds of these shrines by providing explanations on the functions and meanings of the architecture of these temples, as well as their use as a display of power by the Hoysala dynasty. ICOMOS would be grateful if the State Party could provide further information on this matter.

Boundaries

The ICOMOS Panel raised the issue in the additional information letter that the boundaries of the buffer zones sometimes cut across the land plots, roads and houses, which may cause legal complications and management issues. Furthermore, such a mechanism can sometimes compromise the protection of the functionally linked elements or supporting features such as important views. ICOMOS is aware that the current delineation aims to fulfil the legal requirement, and this mechanism has been practised in the country for a long time. However, ICOMOS would like to know whether an alternative way to address this issue could be considered.

The ICOMOS Panel welcomes the expansion of the buffer zone proposed by the State Party to include the Vishnu Samudra Tank and associated tank road. ICOMOS would like to know why the water tank has been included in the buffer zone rather than the nominated property and what are the legal provisions and managerial measures applied to this extended buffer zone area.

Site Management Plan

The ICOMOS Panel considers that the current Site Management Plan (SMP) submitted as a part of the nomination dossier is both pragmatic and practical. ICOMOS considers that the nominated property will benefit from its implementation. ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could provide more information on when this plan will be implemented. ICOMOS would like to stress that for the SMP to be valid over time, a periodic revision mechanism should be incorporated into the plan. ICOMOS would therefore be grateful if the State Party could provide information on how the validity of the SMP will be maintained over time, and how often the plan will be updated.

Previous interventions

The ICOMOS Panel is aware that the Archaeological Survey of India maintains an extensive archive of the past interventions of the nominated temple complexes. ICOMOS would like to know how this wealth of information is used to draw experiences from past interventions and provide a basis for future conservation interventions. ICOMOS would also like to know whether these archives and documentation are accessible to the stakeholders.

Intangible dimension of the property and engagement of the local community

The ICOMOS Panel considers that the traditional use and function of the nominated temples are a part of their authenticity. Currently, religious activities have ceased at two of the three nominated temples. ICOMOS learned that opening these temples to the local community for their religious practice would imply a legal or policy change in the country. ICOMOS would be grateful if the State Party could provide further information on this matter. ICOMOS would also be interested to know how the local communities are currently involved in and benefit from the management and protection activities of the nominated temples.

Monitoring

The ICOMOS Panel appreciates the detailed table of monitoring indicators provided by the State Party in the additional information. These monitoring indicators cover all the essential aspects to be monitored in the nominated property. ICOMOS considers, however, that for the monitoring system to be effective, a set of responsive actions should be linked to the monitoring indicators, and the threshold or the condition for triggering the responsive actions should be defined. More specifically, when a value of the monitoring indicators reaches the threshold, actions should be taken to mitigate the situation. ICOMOS considers that such links between monitoring indicators and reactive actions are still lacking in the current system. ICOMOS would be pleased if the State Party could consider developing such links, if not done already, and provide a table listing the monitoring indicators, the thresholds and the actions associated with the monitoring indicators.

Carrying capacity

In the Site Management Plan, tourism is viewed as a positive factor for protecting the temples and benefiting the local communities and therefore is encouraged. It is also mentioned that the nominated temple complexes will be managed considering their carrying capacity. Could the State Party please provide the envisaged timeline for the establishment of the carrying capacity of each of the nominated temple complexes?

Interpretation and presentation

The ICOMOS Panel notes that the nominated temple complexes are currently interpreted and presented individually. Since these complexes are nominated as a serial property, interpretation and presentation should also be provided for the nominated property as a whole. ICOMOS would like to know whether the State Party envisages a holistic approach to better contextualise the interpretation and presentation of the nominated property at each nominated temple so that the values of the whole series could be conveyed to the visitors.

We look forward to your responses to these points, which will be of great help in our evaluation procedure.

We would be grateful if you could provide **ICOMOS** and the **World Heritage Centre** with the above information **by 28 February 2023 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* for additional 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 additional 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 procedure.

Yours faithfully,



Gwenaëlle Bourdin
Director
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

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Archaeological Survey of India, Delhi
Department of Archaeology, Museums and Heritage, Karnataka
Indian National Commission for Cooperation with UNESCO
UNESCO World Heritage Centre