We, the participants of the UNESCO World Heritage Young Professionals Forum 2023 would like to extend our sincere thanks to the Chairperson of the extended 45th session of the World Heritage Committee, and to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre for organizing this Forum. Furthermore, we are grateful to the Ministry of Culture; the Saudi Heritage Commission; and the National Committee for Education, Culture and Science in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for hosting the Forum. Our heartfelt thanks go as well to the Diadrasis NGO for their support, and the groups of experts and facilitators for their enriching insights and mentorship. Along with them, we have examined pertinent vectors of World Heritage including climate change; sustainable tourism; digital evolution; and the diversity and representation of World Heritage. We have benefitted from the local experience of the host country’s diverse heritage; and have gained valuable skills and expertise to support the next 50 years of protecting natural and cultural heritage.

First and foremost, we call upon the States Parties to address the effects of climate change on cultural and natural heritage through a multidisciplinary approach. We stress the importance of identification and the engagement of diverse and multiple stakeholders.

With the pressing global impacts of climate change, we urge the States Parties to work on international preparedness through risk assessment, reactive emergency response, and post disaster recovery and conservation, resulting in effective risk related policies and mitigating procedures.

Recognizing communities as the custodians and caretakers of heritage, we urge the States Parties to bridge the gap between local communities and heritage experts by creating platforms, frameworks, and capacity building initiatives which valorize the inherent knowledge residing in the communities, and ensure equal participation in the decision making process. We further encourage the State Parties to foster creative ways of mobilizing society to react collectively to pre- and post- climate crisis scenarios.

Understanding the long-term and rapidly evolving impacts of tourism on heritage, we recommend the States Parties to ensure the neutral, sustained study and monitoring of these
effects on communities, and to establish active communication with them, to co-develop context-relevant sustainable tourism approaches and strategies.

Recognizing the fact that tangible and living heritage are vulnerable to external influences alike, we urge decision makers to ensure that the communities’ traditions and relationship to their environment are protected.

Realising the negative impacts of over-tourism on heritage destinations, we urge States Parties to transform their national tourism strategies from a quantity-based approach to a quality-based approach focused on local livelihoods and economies, by promoting local crafts and businesses. We further invite the States Parties to develop and support initiatives and training on sustainable tourism mechanisms, which will directly impact future careers in the field and contribute to the national GDP.

Understanding that authenticity plays a key role in the preservation of heritage and forms the core of the OUV of World Heritage properties, we urge State Parties to retain unique ways of expression and develop effective policies and procedures that ensure the active participation of all stakeholders and move towards regenerative tourism.

Digital technologies should be seen as complementary tools to study and promote cultural and natural heritage rather than as the ultimate aim themselves. We invite States Parties to reflect on the best ways in which innovative digital technologies can aid in the management, capacity building, and documentation of heritage sites. We advise to consider these tools as a way of engaging younger generations and groups with different capacities; and reaching a wider, international audience. These platforms could also serve as an opportunity for international collaboration of scientists, researchers, and heritage professionals, through enhanced accessibility. We call upon the State Parties to ensure the ethical and secure use of data, and to promote open access softwares and platforms. However, we suggest that they remain mindful of the risks attached to the use of rapidly evolving digital technologies, including the nefarious use of data, security breaches, exclusion of certain groups, and the neglect of the physical attributes of heritage.

In addition, acknowledging the potential of social media, we strongly recommend that concerned authorities of the States Parties leverage all the digital tools and utilize existing social media communities to promote heritage with a holistic approach.

We call on all of the States Parties to intensify their efforts into bringing more diversity in the inscription of World Heritage sites, through the continuous exploration of opportunities for underrepresented regions and categories of heritage. The States Parties must involve local communities and ensure the inclusion of traditional and indigenous knowledge in the inscription process.

Lastly, we demand the State Parties to include the younger generations and give agency to their voice in the discussions on cultural and natural heritage. The perspective and new approaches of young professionals are indispensable to modern planning and management of heritage, as well
as to navigating a world of evolving technology. The States Parties must hence provide additional support to young people who are passionate about their heritage, its promotion and protection. We advise the States Parties to reaffirm their efforts to the best of their capabilities, and provide young people with the programmes, platforms and resources required to better manage heritage in the future.

We acknowledge our roles as the future decision makers of heritage, and as we continue to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, we are ready to take the baton of protecting our shared natural and cultural heritage for the next 50 years and beyond!