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14 December 2023

IUCN Evaluation of the Badain Jaran Desert – Towers of Sand and Lakes – Nominated for inclusion on the World Heritage List – Interim report and request for supplementary information

Dear Ambassador,

Further to our letter of 31 January 2023, I am writing to outline the status and any issues relevant to above evaluation, which is requested to be sent by IUCN before 31 January 2023 in conformity with the Operational Guidelines (paragraph 149 and Annex 6 – 'Evaluation procedures of the Advisory Bodies for nominations').

The IUCN World Heritage technical evaluation missions to Badain Jaran Desert – Towers of Sand and Lakes was undertaken by Prof Kyung-Sik Woo in June 2023. The evaluator greatly appreciated the excellent support, organisation and co-operation provided by your authorities in the preparation and implementation of the mission, and the kind welcome throughout the missions. Please convey our sincere thanks to all of the officials, scientists and contributors that assisted the missions.

Following the field evaluation mission, the IUCN World Heritage Panel is in the course of examining World Heritage nominations for natural and mixed properties, and cultural landscapes. This process will conclude in March/April 2024, following which the IUCN evaluation report will be issued to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre. The IUCN Panel examined in detail above-mentioned nomination, including reports of field evaluators and desktop reviews of external reviewers, as well as other references regarding the nominated properties.

The Panel greatly appreciated the State Party's efforts in relation to this nomination, and will be discussing the nomination again at its second meeting, to be held in March 2023. The Panel notes the strong potential of component part 1 "Badain Jaran Megadunes" to demonstrate global significance under criteria (vii) and (viii). However, the Panel is not convinced that the component parts of Haisenchulu, Eribugai Gorge and Mandela Mt. would contribute to the potential Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property.

The Panel wishes to clarify a number of points regarding this nomination, in relation to integrity, protection and management, including points specific to the nominated component parts as set out below. The Panel would be very grateful for supplementary information on the following points:

- 1) Considering the time that has passed since the original submission of the nomination dossier, the Panel would appreciate an update on the current protection regime for the nominated property. In particular, the Panel has noted that component part 1 (Badain Jaran Megadunes) does not appear to be fully included in protected areas, according to maps 9 and 10 annexed to the nomination dossier. The Panel has also noted that the nomination dossier confirms that the nominated property will be designated as a National Park (see e.g. p.11). Therefore, the Panel would be grateful for:
 - a. An update on the designation of the nominated property as National Park, including timelines for its creation, maps showing the national park boundaries in relation to the boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zone, and information as to how this National Park would protect the potential OUV of the nominated property;
 - b. A reassurance from the State Party that legal protection of the entire nominated property is guaranteed in order to ensure the protection of the potential Outstanding Universal Value

(OUV) in the long-term. The Panel would be grateful to receive a clear and legally binding commitment regarding the nominated property's protection in its entirety;

- 2) The Panel would also appreciate an additional justification of the boundaries for component part 1 (Badain Jaran Megadunes) and its buffer zone supported by maps showing the boundaries of the nominated property and its buffer zones, including:
 - a. the surface area (ha) and maps of each protected area designation with the applicable IUCN Protected Area Category, UNESCO Alxa Desert Global Geopark, Geopark designation at national level, scenic site, nature reserve, and any other relevant protected area overlapping with the proposed boundaries of Component part 1 (Badain Jaran Megadunes),
 - b. the surface area (ha) and detailed maps of the portions of Component Part 1 (Badain Jaran Megadunes) which is not located in an existing protected area designation, if any,
 - c. the surface area (ha) of the portions of the buffer zone of Component Part 1 (Badain Jaran Megadunes) which are not located in an existing protected area designation, if any,
 - d. the surface area (ha) and a map showing the areas that are important for the maintenance of the hydrological processes within the nominated property, related to the aquifer recharge, water flow, level of the groundwater table and springs that are essential for the interdunal lakes.

For the above maps and zones, the Panel would be grateful to receive references to the respective management plan(s) and any legal protection measures which document the boundaries, and the Protected Area zonation and restricted activities, demonstrating the protection status and/or regulatory measures for the dunes, interdunal lakes and associated habitats, such as wetlands;

- 3) Regarding potential threats to the nominated property, the Panel would be grateful for an updated list with summary details of plans for any specific developments in the region, including wind and solar power, tourism developments and any potential future salt, mineral, aggregate and water extraction.

We would appreciate your response to the above points as soon as possible, in order to facilitate the evaluation process, but **no later than 28 February 2024**, as per paragraph 148 of the *Operational Guidelines*. Please note that any information submitted after this date will not be considered by IUCN in its evaluation for the World Heritage Committee. It should be noted, however, that while IUCN 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. Therefore, we kindly ask your authorities to keep their response concise and to respond only to the above requests.

Supplementary information should also be submitted officially in two copies to the UNESCO World Heritage Centre in order for it to be registered as part of the nomination. An electronic copy of all completed and submitted supplementary information to both the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Mr Alessandro Balsamo (a.balsamo@unesco.org) and IUCN Headquarters, Mr Clemens Küpper (clemens.kupper@iucn.org) would also be greatly appreciated. Taking into account your response, IUCN will formulate its final recommendation to the World Heritage Committee.

In the interest of ensuring full transparency and dialogue regarding the IUCN evaluation process, we are happy to respond to any questions you may wish to raise regarding IUCN's work on the World Heritage Convention, including the above points. We would be pleased to organise a meeting via conference call. Please do not hesitate to contact Mr Clemens Küpper, Evaluations & Operations Officer (clemens.kupper@iucn.org) if you have any questions regarding this request, or if you would wish to arrange a conference call to discuss this request.

Please allow me to reiterate our thanks for your support and for the conduct of IUCN's recent mission. We thank you for your cooperation in providing this very important information, which will facilitate the Panel in making its recommendations.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your support and kind cooperation in the implementation of the World Heritage Convention, and I remain,

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'TB', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Tim Badman
Head, Heritage and Culture

cc. National Commission of the People's Republic of China for UNESCO, Mr Qin Changwei, Secretary-General
UNESCO World Heritage Centre, Ms Himalchuli Gurung, Mr Guy Debonnet and Mr Alessandro Balsamo
IUCN Asia Regional Office, Mr Dindo Campilan, Regional Director