

# 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/EG/1712/IR

Charenton-le-Pont, 19 December 2023

H. E. Mr Fahad Bin Maayouf Al Ruwaily  
Delegate ad intérim  
Permanent Delegation of the Kingdom of  
Saudi Arabia to UNESCO  
Maison de l'UNESCO  
1, rue Miollis  
75732 Paris Cedex

## **World Heritage List 2024**

### **The Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area (Saudi Arabia) – Interim report and additional information request**

Dear Sir,

As prescribed by the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* and its Annex 6, the Advisory Bodies are requested to submit a short interim report for each nomination by 31 January 2024. 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 Cultural Landscape of Al-Faw Archaeological Area” was carried out by Mr. Muati Al Muati (Oman) in October 2023. 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 4 October 2023, an additional information letter was sent by ICOMOS to request further information regarding the coordination of management, buffer zone mapping, protection of the wider setting, conservation approach, management plan, tourism, visitor management and interpretation, future farming uses, local communities, traditional protection, and the ‘Uruq Bani Ma’arid World Heritage site. Please convey our thanks to all the officials and experts for the additional information you provided on 8 November 2023 and for their continued cooperation in this process.

At the end of November 2023, the ICOMOS World Heritage Panel evaluated the cultural and mixed properties nominated for inscription on the World Heritage List in 2024. 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 2024.

We thank you and your Delegation for your availability and your participation in the meeting held on 25 November 2023 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 this last part of the 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:

### **Legal protection in the buffer zone**

Recent research has demonstrated that the buffer zone has strong archaeological potential; therefore, ICOMOS considers that it is important to ensure robust legal protection of the archaeological remains in the buffer zone. While the landscape of the buffer zone can be effectively protected by the regulation to control and limit the drilling of new wells of the Ministry of Environment, Water and Agriculture (MEWA), the legal provision for protecting the archaeological remains seems weaker. ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could provide detailed information on how the archaeological remains located in the buffer zone are protected by legal, regulatory, contractual, and customary means.

### **Management**

ICOMOS welcomes the significant progress that has been made in establishing the collaborative management mechanism between the cultural and natural conservation sectors. Currently, the whole nominated property has been designated as a National Heritage Site and is protected by the Law of Antiquities, Museums, and Urban Heritage of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the Heritage Commission of the Ministry of Culture is the governmental institution responsible for implementing this law. However, based on the current administrative arrangement, the National Center for Wildlife (NCW) is in charge of managing the part of the nominated property above the escarpment. Since the primary function of the NCW is to protect natural heritage, ICOMOS would appreciate if the State Party could provide further clarification on the responsibilities of the various institutions in relation to the cultural heritage situated above the escarpment.

### **Research**

ICOMOS acknowledges that the past decades of archaeological research have established a solid foundation for understanding the values of the site. ICOMOS also notes that new technologies used in recent years have improved the surveying, documentation and recording of archaeological remains, leading to significant archaeological discoveries in the nominated property and buffer zone. ICOMOS would be interested to know whether there is a long-term archaeological research plan in place to further the knowledge of these areas.

### **Interpretation**

ICOMOS considers that opening the nominated property to visitors is a positive step in communicating its value to a wider audience. The current tourism strategy and cautious approach to developing tourism facilities without damaging the landscape or archaeological remains are commendable. ICOMOS considers that, while the physical infrastructure constitutes a part of the presentation and interpretation of the values of the nominated property, the narratives are equally important. ICOMOS would like to know whether a holistic interpretation and presentation plan has been envisaged by the State Party, whether the narratives have placed the nominated property within the political, economic, and religious contexts of the region, and whether the history of the cities, oasis, tribes, kingdoms, and trade hubs in the Arabian Peninsula and beyond have been integrated into the narratives used for interpretation of the nominated property.

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 requested information by **28 February 2024 at the latest**, the deadline set out in paragraph 148 of the *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* concerning additional information on nominations to be received. Please note that any information submitted after this statutory deadline 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 within the statutory deadline, it will not be possible to properly evaluate a completely revised nomination or a large amount of new information submitted at the last minute. ICOMOS would therefore 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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gwenaëlle Bourdin', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Gwenaëlle Bourdin  
Director  
ICOMOS Evaluation Unit

Copy to            Heritage Commission  
                         UNESCO World Heritage Centre